













**MY LADY OF THE CHIMNEY-  
CORNER**

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**THE SOULS OF POOR FOLK**

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*In faltering tones Eliza made her request.*

Frontis. M.L.C.

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*MY LADY OF THE  
CHIMNEY CORNER  
& THE SOULS OF  
POOR FOLK*

*by*

*ALEXANDER  
IRVINE*

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# MY LADY OF THE CHIMNEY- CORNER

TO

THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE  
HELPING IRELAND TO MAKE  
HER DREAMS COME TRUE



## **FOREWORD**

THIS book is the torn manuscript of the most beautiful life I ever knew. I have merely pieced and patched it together, and have not even changed or disguised the names of the little group of neighbours who lived with us, at "the bottom of the world."

**A. I.**



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## CHAPTER I

### LOVE IS ENOUGH

“**A**NNA’S purty, an’ she’s good as well as purty. but th’ beauty an’ goodness that’s hers is short lived, I’m thinkin’,” said old Bridget McGrady to her neighbour Mrs. Tierney, as Mrs. Gilmore passed the door, leading her five-year-old girl, Anna, by the hand. The old women were sitting on the doorstep as the worshippers came down the lane from early mass on a summer morning.

“ Thru for you, Bridget, for th’ do say that th’ Virgin takes all sich childther before they’re ten.”

“ Musah, but Mrs. Gilmore’ll take on terrible,” continued Mrs. Tierney, “ but th’ will of God must be done.”

Anna was dressed in a dainty pink dress. A wide blue ribbon kept her wealth of jet black hair in order as it hung down her back, and the squeaking of her little shoes drew attention to the fact that they were new and in the fashion.

“ It’s a mortal pity she’s a girl,” said Bridget, “ bekase she might hev been an althar boy before she goes.”

“ Ay, but if she was a bhoy shure there’s no tellin’ what divilment she’d get into; so maybe it’s just as well.”

The Gilmores lived on a small farm near Crumlin in County Antrim. They were not considered “ well-to-do,” neither were they poor. They worked hard and by dint of economy managed to keep their children at school. Anna was a favourite child. Her quiet demeanour and gentle disposition drew to her

many considerations denied the rest of the family. She was a favourite in the community. By the old women she was considered "too good to live"; she took "kindly" to the house of God. Her teacher said, "Anna has a great head for learning." This expression, oft repeated, gave the Gilmores an ambition to prepare Anna for teaching. Despite the Schedule arranged for her, she was confirmed in the parish chapel at the age of ten. At fifteen she had exhausted the educational facilities of the community and set her heart on institutions of higher learning in the larger cities. While her parents were figuring that way the boys of the parish were figuring in a different direction. Before Anna was seventeen there was scarcely a boy living within miles who had not at one time or another lingered around the gate of the Gilmore garden. Mrs. Gilmore watched Anna carefully. She warned her against the danger of an alliance with a boy of a lower station. The girl was devoted to the Church. She knew her Book of Devotions as few of the older people knew it, and before she was twelve she had read the Lives of the Saints. None of these things made her an ascetic. She could laugh heartily and had a keen sense of humour.

The old women revised their prophecies. They now spoke of her "takin' th' veil." Some said she would make "a gey good schoolmistress," for she was fond of children.

While waiting the completion of arrangements to continue her schooling, she helped her mother with the household work. She spent a good deal of her time, too, in helping the old and disabled of the village. She carried water to them from the village well and tidied up their cottages at least once a week.

The village well was the point of departure in many a romance. There the boys and girls met

several times a day. Many a boy's first act of chivalry was to take the girl's place under the hoop that kept the cans apart and carry home the supply of water.

Half a century after the incident that played havoc with the dreams and visions of which she was the central figure, Anna said to me: "I was fillin' my cans at th' well. He was standin' there lukin' at me.

" 'Wud ye mind,' says he, 'if I helped ye?'

" 'Deed no, not at all,' says I.

" So he filled my cans an' then says he: 'I would give you a nice wee cow if I cud carry them home fur ye.'

" 'It's not home I'm goin',' says I, 'but to an' oul' neighbour who can't carry it herself.'

" 'So much the better fur me,' says he, an' off he walked between the cans.

" At Mary McKinstry's doore that afthernoon we stood till the shadows began t' fall.'

From the accounts rendered, old Mary did not lack for water-carriers for months after that. One evening Mary made tea for the water-carriers, and after tea she "tossed th' cups" for them.

" Here's two roads, dear," she said to Anna, " an' wan day ye'll haave t' choose betwixt them. On wan road there's love an' clane teeth (poverty), an' on t'other riches an' hell on earth."

" What else do you see on the roads, Mary?" Anna asked.

" Plenty ov childther on th' road t' clane teeth, an' dogs an' cats on th' road t' good livin'."

" What haave ye fur me, Mary?" Jamie Irvine, Anna's friend, asked.

She took his cup, gave it a shake, looked wise, and said: " Begorra, I see a big cup, me bhoy—it's a cup o' grief, I'm thinkin' it is."

" Oul' Mary was jist bletherin'," he said, as they

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walked down the road in the gloaming, hand in hand.

"A cup of sorrow isn't so bad, Jamie, when there's two to drink it," Anna said.

He pressed her hand tighter, and replied: "Ay, that's threue, fur then it's only half a cup."

Jamie was a shoemaker's apprentice. His parents were very poor. The struggle for existence left time for nothing else. As the children reached the age of eight or nine they entered the struggle. Jamie began when he was eight. He had never spent a day at school. His family considered him fortunate, however, that he could be an apprentice.

The cup that old Mary saw in the tea-leaves seemed something more than "blether" when it was noised abroad that Anna and Jamie were to be married.

The Gilmores strenuously objected. They objected because they had another career mapped out for Anna. Jamie was illiterate, too, and she was well educated. He was a Protestant and she an ardent Catholic. Illiteracy was common enough, and, might be overlooked, but a mixed marriage was unthinkable.

The Irvines, on the other hand, although very poor, could see nothing but disaster in marriage with a Catholic, even though she was as "pure and beautiful as the Virgin."

"It's a shame an' a scandal," others said, "that a young fella who can't read his own name shud marry sich a nice girl wi' sich larnin'."

Jamie made some defence, but it wasn't convincing.

"Doesn't the Bible say maan an' wife are wan?" he asked Mrs. Gilmore in discussing the question with her.

"Ay."

"Well, when Anna an' me are wan won't she haave a thrade, an' won't I haave an education?"

"That's wan way ov lukin' at a vexed question, but you're th' only wan that luks at it that way!"

"There's two," Anna said. "That's how I see it."

When Jamie became a journeyman shoemaker, the priest was asked to perform the marriage ceremony. He refused, and there was nothing left to do but get a man who would give love as big a place as religion, and they were married by the vicar of the parish church.

Not in the memory of man in that community had a wedding created so little interest in one way and so much in another. They were both "turncoats," the people said, and they were shunned by both sides. So they drank their first big draught of the "cup o' grief" on their wedding-day.

"Sufferin' will be yer portion in this world," Anna's mother told her, "an' in th' world t' come separation from yer maan."

Anna kissed her mother and said: "I've made my choice, mother, I've made it before God, and as for Jamie's welfare in the next world, I'm sure that love like his would turn either Limbo, Purgatory, or Hell into a very nice place to live in!"

A few days after the wedding the young couple went out to the four cross-roads. Jamie stood his staff on end and said: "Are ye ready, dear?"

"Ay, I'm ready, but don't tip it in the direction of your preference!"

He was inclined toward Dublin, she toward Belfast. They laughed. Jamie suddenly took his hand from the staff and it fell, neither toward Belfast nor Dublin, but toward the town of Antrim, and toward Antrim they set out on foot. It was a distance of less than ten miles, but it was the longest journey she ever took—and the shortest, for she had all the world beside her, and so had Jamie. It was in June,

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and they had all the time there was. There was no hurry. They were as carefree as children, and utilised their freedom in full. Between Killead and Antrim they came to Willie Withero's stone-pile. Willie was Antrim's most noted stone-breaker in those days. He was one of the town's new centres. At his stone-pile he got the news going and coming. He was a strange mixture of philosophy and cynicism. He had a rough exterior, and spoke in short, curt, snapish sentences, but behind it all he had a big heart full of kindly human feeling.

"Antrim's a purty good place fur pigs an' sich to live in," he told the travellers. "Ye see, pigs is naither Fenians nor Orangemen. I get along purty well m'self bekase I sit on both sides ov th' fence at th' same time."

"How do you do it, Misther Withero?" Anna asked demurely.

"Don't call me 'Misther,'" Willie said: "only quality calls me 'Misther,' an' I don't like it—it doesn't fit an honest stone-breaker."

The question was repeated, and he said: "I wear a green ribbon on Pathrick's Day an' an orange cockade on th' Twelfth ov July, an' if th' ax m' why, I tell thim t' go t' h——l! That's Withero fur ye, an' wan ov 'in is enough for Antrim, that's why I niver married, an' that'll save ye the trouble ov axin' me whither I've got a wife or no!"

"What church d'ye attend, Willie?" Jamie asked.

"Church is it, ye're axin' about? Luk here, me bhoy, step over th' stile." Willie led the way over into the field.

"Step over here, me girl." Anna followed.

A few yards from the hedge there was an ant-hill.

"See them ants?"

"Ay."

"Now if Withero thought them ants hated aych

other like th' men ov Anthrim, d'ye know what I'd do?"

"What?"

"I'd pour a kittle ov boilin' wather on thim an' roast the hides off ivery mother's son ov thim. Ay, that's what I'd do, shure as gun's iron!"

"That would be a sure and speedy cure," Anna said, smiling.

"What's this world but an ant-hill?" he asked. "Jist a big ant-hill, an' we're ants begorra an' uncles, but instead ov workin' like these wee fellas do—help aych other an' shouldther aych other's burdens, an' build up th' town, an' forage fur fodder, begobs we cut aych other's throats over th' colour of ribbon, or th' kind ov a church we attind! Ugh, what balderdash!"

The stone-breaker dropped on his knees beside the ant-hill and eyed the manœuvring of the ants.

"Luk here!" he said.

They looked in the direction of his pointed finger and observed an ant dragging a dead fly over the hill.

"Jist watch that wee fella!"

They watched. The ant had a big job, but it pulled and pushed the big awkward carcass over the side of the hill. A second ant came along, sized up the situation, and took a hand. "Ha, ha!" he chortled, "that's th' ticket, now kape yer eye on him!"

The ants dragged the fly over the top of the hill and stuffed it down a hole.

"Now," said Withero, "if a fella in Anthrim wanted a han' th' other fellah wud say: 'Where d'ye hing yer hat up on Sunday?' or some other sich fool question!"

"He wud that."

"Now mind ye, I'm not huffed at th' churches,

aither Orange or Green, or th' praychers aither—tho' 'pon m' soul, ivery time I luk at wan o' them I think ov God as a first-class journeyman tailor! But I get more good switherin' over an ant-hill than whin wan o' them wee praychers thry t' make me feel as miserable as th' devil!"

"There's somethin' in that," Jamie said.

"Ay, ye kin bate a pair ov oul' boots there is!"

"What will th' ants do wi' th' fly?" Jamie asked.

"Huh!" he grunted, with an air of authority, "they'll haave rump steaks fur tay and fly broth fur breakvist th' morra!"

"Th' don't need praychers down there, do th', Willie?"

"Don't need him up here!" he said. "They're sign-boards t' point th' way that iverybody knows as well as th' nose on his face!"

"Good-bye," Anna said, as they prepared to leave.

"Good-bye, an' God save ye both kindly," were Willie's parting words. He adjusted the wire protectors to his eyes and the sojourners went on down the road.

They found a mossy bank and unpacked their dinner.

"Quare, isn't he?" Jamie said.

"He has more sense than any of our people."

"That's no compliment t' Withero, Anna, but I was jist thinkin' about our case; we've got t' decide somethin', an' we might as well decide it here as anywhere."

"About religion, Jamie?"

"Aye."

"I've decided."

"When?"

"At the ant-hill."

"Ye cudn't be Withero?"

"No, dear, Willie sees only half th' world. There's

love in it, that's bigger than colour of ribbon or creed of church. We've proven that, Jamie, haven't we?"

"But what haave ye decided?"

"That love is bigger than religion. That two things are sure. One is love of God. He loves all His children and gets huffed at none. The other is that the love we have for each other is of the same warp and woof as His for us, and *love is enough*, Jamie."

"Ay, love is shure enough, an' enough's as good as a faste, but what about childther if th' come, Anna?"

"We don't cross a stile till we come to it, do we?"

"That's right, that's right, acushla; now we're as rich as lords, aren't we, but I'm th' richest, amn't I? I've got you and you've only got me."

"I've got book learning, but you've got love and a trade, what more do I want? You've got more love than any man that ever wooed a woman—so I'm richer, amn't I?"

"Oh, God," Jamie said, "but isn't this th' lovely world, eh, Anna?"

Within a mile of Antrim they saw a cottage perched on a high bluff by the road side. It was reached by stone steps. They climbed the steps to ask for a drink of water. They were kindly received. The owner was a follower of Wesley, and his conversation at the well was in sharp contrast to the philosophy at the stone-pile. The young journeyman and his wife were profoundly impressed with the place. The stone cottage was vine clad. There were beautiful trees and a garden. The June flowers were in bloom and a cow grazed in the pasture near by.

"Some day we'll haave a home like this," Jamie said, as they descended the steps.

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Anna named it "The Mount of Temptation," for it was the nearest she had ever been to the sin of envy. A one-armed Crimean pensioner named Steele occupied it during my youth. It could be seen from Pogue's Entry, and Anna used to point it out and tell the story of that memorable journey. In days when clouds were heavy and low and the gaunt wolf stood at the door, she would say: "Do you mind the journey to Antrim, Jamie?"

"Ay," he would say, with a sigh, "an' we've been in love ever since, haven't we, Anna?"

## CHAPTER II

### THE WOLF AND THE CARPENTER

FOR a year after their arrival in Antrim they lived in the home of the master shoemaker for whom Jamie worked as journeyman. It was a great hardship, for there was no privacy, and their daily walk and conversation, in front of strangers, was of the "yea, yea" and "nay, nay" order. In the summer-time they spent their Sundays on the banks of Lough Neagh, taking whatever food they needed and cooking it on the sand. They continued their courting in that way. They watched the water-fowl on the great wide marsh, they waded in the water and played as children played. In more serious moods she read to him Moore's poems and went over the later lessons of her school life. Even with but part of a day in each week together they were very happy. The world was full of sunshine for them then. There were no clouds, no regrets, no fears. It was a period—a brief period—that for the rest of their lives they looked back upon as a time when they really lived. I am not sure, but I am of the impression that the chief reason she could not be persuaded to visit the Lough in later life was because she wanted to remember it as she had seen it in that first year of their married life.

Their first child was two years of age when the famine came—the famine that swept over Ireland like a plague, leaving in its wake over a million new-made graves. They had been in their own house for over a year. It was scantily furnished, but it was *home*. As the ravages of the famine spread.

nearly every family in the town mourned the absence of some member. Men and women met on the street one day, were gone the next. Jamie put his bench to one side and sought work at anything he could get to do. Prices ran up beyond the possibilities of the poor. The potato crop only failed. The other crops were reaped and the proceeds sent to England as rent and interest, and the reapers having sent the last farthing, lay down with their wives and children and died. Of the million who died, four hundred thousand were able-bodied men. The wolf stood at every door. The carpenter alone was busy. Of course, it was the poor who died—the poor only. In her three years of married life Anna realised in a measure that the future held little change for her or her husband, but she saw a ray of hope for the boy in the cradle. When the foodless days came and the child was not getting food enough to survive, she gave vent to her feelings of despair. Jamie did not quite understand when she spoke of the death of hope.

"Spake what's in yer heart plainly, Anna!" he said plaintively.

"Jamie, we must not blame each other for anything, but we must face the fact—we live at the bottom of the world where every hope has a headstone—a headstone that only waits for the name."

"Ay, dear, God help us, I know, I know what ye mane."

"Above and beyond us," she continued, "there is a world of nice things—books, furniture, pictures—a world where people and things can be kept clean, but it's a world we could never reach. But I had hope—"

She buried her face in her hands and was silent.

"Ay ay, acushla, I know yer hope's in the boy, but don't give up. We'll fight it out together if th'

worst comes to th' worst. The boy'll live, shure he will!"

He could not bear the agony on her face. It distracted him. He went out and sought solitude on a pile of stones at the back of the house. There was no solitude there, nor could he have remained long if there had been. He returned, and drawing a stool up close beside her, he sat down and put an arm tenderly over her shoulder.

"Cheer up, wee girl," he said, "our ship's comin' in soon."

"If we can only save him!" she said, pointing to the cradle.

"Well, we won't cry over spilt milk, dear—not at laste until it's spilt."

"Ah," she exclaimed, "I had such hopes for him!"

"Ay, so haave I, but thin again I've thought t' myself, suppose th' wee fella did get t' be kind-a quality like, wudn't he be ashamed ov me an' you maybe, an' shure an ingrate that's somethin' is worse than nothin'!"

"A child born in pure love couldn't be an ingrate, Jamie; that isn't possible, dear."

"Ah, who knows what a chile will be, Anna?"

The child awoke and began to cry. It was a cry for food. There was nothing in the house; there had been nothing all that day. They looked at each other. Jamie turned away his face. He arose and left the house. He went aimlessly down the street, wondering where he should try for something to eat for the child. There were several old friends whom he supposed were in the same predicament, but to whom he had not appealed. It was getting to be an old story. A score of as good children as his had been buried. Everybody was polite, full of sympathy, but the child was losing his vitality, so was the mother. Something desperate must be done,

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and done at once. For the third time he importuned a grocer at whose shop he had spent much money. The grocer was just putting up the window shutters for the night.

"If ye cud jist spare us a ha'p'orth ov milk to keep th' life in th' chile fur th' night?" he pleaded.

"It wouldn't be a thimbleful if I had it, Jamie, but I haven't—we haave childther ov our own, ye know, an' life is life!"

"Ay ay," he said, "I know, I know," and shuffled out again. Back to the house he went. He lifted the latch gently and tip-toed in. Anna was rocking the child to sleep. He went softly to the table and took up a tin can and turned again toward the door.

Anna divined his stealthy movement. She was beside him in an instant.

"Where are you going, Jamie?"

He hesitated. She forced an answer.

"Jamie," she said in a tone new to her, "there's been nothing but truth and love between us; I must know."

"I'm goin' out wi' that can to get somethin' fur that chile, Anna, if I haave t' swing fur it. That's what's in my mind, an' God help me!"

"God help us both," she said.

He moved toward the street. She planted herself between him and the door.

"No, we must stand together. They'll put you in jail, and then the child and I will die anyway. Let's wait another day!"

They sat down together in the corner. It was dark now, and they had no candle. The last handful of turf was on the fire. They watched the sparks play and the fitful spurts of flame light up for an instant at a time the darkened home. It was a picture of despair—the first of a long series that ran down the years with them. They sat in silence

for a long time. Then they whispered to each other with many a break the words they had spoken in what now seemed to them the long ago. The fire died out. They retired, but not to sleep. They were too hungry. There was an insatiable gnawing at their vitals that made sleep impossible. It was like a cancer with excruciating pain added. Sheer exhaustion only stilled the cries of the starving child. There were no more tears in their eyes, but anguish has by-valves more keen, poignant, and subtle.

In agony they lay in silence and counted time by the repercussion of pain until the welcome dawn came with its new supply of hope. The scream of a frenzied mother who had lost a child in the night was the prelude to a tragic day. Anna dressed quickly and in a few minutes stood by the side of the woman. There was nothing to say. Nothing to do. It was her turn. It would be Anna's next. All over the town the spectre hovered. Every day the reaper garnered a new harvest of human sheaves. Every day the wolf barked. Every day the carpenter came.

When Anna returned Jamie had gone. She took her station by the child. Jamie took the tin can and went out along the Graystone Road for about a mile, and entered a pasture where three cows were grazing. He was weak and nervous. His eyes were bloodshot and his hands trembled. He had never milked a cow. He had no idea of the difficulty involved in catching a cow and milking her in a pasture. There was the milk and yonder his child, who, without it, would not survive the day. Desperation dominated and directed every movement.

The cows walked away as he approached. He followed. He drove them into a corner of the field and managed to get his hand on one. He tried to pet her, but the jingling of the can frightened her and off they went—all of them—on a fast trot along

the side of the field. He became cautious as he cornered them a second time. This time he succeeded in reaching an udder. He got a tit in his hand. He lowered himself to his haunches and proceeded to tug vigorously. His hand was waxy and stuck as if glued to the flesh. Before there was any sign of milk the cow gave him a swift kick that sent him flat on his back. By the time he pulled himself together again the cows were galloping to the other end of the pasture.

"God!" he muttered, as he mopped the sweat from his face with his sleeve, "if ye've got aany pity or kindly feelin' giv' me a sup ov that milk fur m' chile! Come on!"

His legs trembled so that he could scarcely stand. Again he approached. The cows eyed him with sullen concern. They were thoroughly scared now, and he couldn't get near enough to lay a hand on any of them. He stood in despair, trembling from head to foot. He realised that what he would do he must do quickly.

The morning had swift wings—it was flying away. Some one would be out for the cows ere long, and his last chance would be gone. He dropped the can and ran to the farm-house. There was a stack-yard in the rear. He entered and took a rope from a stack. It was a long rope—too long for his use, but he did not want destroy its usefulness. He dragged it through the hedge after him. This time with care and caution he got near enough to throw the rope over the horns of a cow. Leading her to a fence, he tied her to it and began again. It came slowly. His strength was almost gone. He went from one side to the other—now at one tit, now at another. From his haunches he went to his knees, and from that position he stretched out his legs and sat flat on the grass. He no sooner had a good position than the

cow would change hers. She trampled on his legs and swerved from side to side, but he held on. It was a life and death struggle. The little milk at the bottom of the can gave him strength and courage. As he literally pulled it out of her, his strength increased. When the can was half full he turned the cow loose and made for the gap in the hedge. Within a yard of it he heard a loud report of a gun, and the can dropped to the ground. The ball had ploughed through both lugs of the can, disconnecting the wire handle. Not much of the milk was lost. He picked up the can and started down the road as fast as his legs could take him. He had only gone a hundred yards when a man stepped out into the road and levelled a gun at him.

"Another yard an' I'll blow your brains out!" the man said.

"Is this yer milk?" Jamie asked.

"Ay, an' well ye know it's m' milk!"

Jamie put the can down on the road and stood silent. The farmer delivered himself of a volume of profane abuse. Jamie did not reply. He stood with his head bowed and to all appearances in a mood of penitence.

When the man finished his threats and abuse he stooped to pick up the can. Before his hand touched it Jamie sprang at him with the ferocity of a panther. There was a life and death tussle for a few seconds, and both men went down on the road—Jamie on top. Sitting on the man's chest he took a wrist in each hand and pinned him to the ground.

"Ye think I'm a thief," he said to the man, as he looked at him with eyes that burned like live coals. "I'm not, I'm an honest man, but I haave a chile dying wi' hunger—now it's your life or his, by \_\_\_\_ an' ye'll decide!"

"I think yer a liar as well as a thief," the man

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said, "but if ye can prove what ye say, I'm yer friend."

"Will ye go with me?"

"Ay."

"D'ye mane it?"

"Ay, I do!"

"I'll carry th' gun."

"Ye may, there's nothin' in it."

"There's enough in th' butt t' batther a maan's brains out."

Jamie seized the gun and the can and the man got up.

They walked down the road in silence, each watching the other out of the corners of his eyes.

"D'ye believe in God?" Jamie asked abruptly. The farmer hesitated before answering.

"Why d'ye ask?"

"I'd like t' see a maan in these times that believed wi' his heart insted ov his mouth."

"Wud he let other people milk his cows?" asked the man sneeringly.

"He mightn't haave cows t' milk," Jamie said. "But he'd be kind and not a glutton!"

They arrived at the house. The man went in first. He stopped near the door, and Jamie instinctively and in fear shot past him. What he saw dazed him.

"Ah, God!" he exclaimed. "She's dead!"

Anna lay on her back on the floor and the boy was asleep by the hearth with his head in the ashes. The neighbours were alarmed, and came to assist. The farmer felt Anna's pulse. It was feebly fluttering.

"She's not dead," he said. "Get some cold wather quickly!"

They dashed the water in her face and brought her back to consciousness. When she looked around, she said: "Who's this kind man come in to help, Jamie?"

"He's a farmer," Jamie said, "an' he's brot ye a pint ov nice fresh milk!" The man had filled a cup with milk and put it to Anna's lips.

She refused. "He's dying," she said, pointing to the boy, who lay limp on the lap of a neighbour.

The child was drowsy and listless. They gave him the cup of milk; he had scarcely enough strength to drink. Anna drank what was left, which was very little.

"God bless you!" Anna said, as she held out her hand to the farmer.

"God save you kindly," he answered, as he took her hand and bowed his head. "I've a wife an' wains myself," he continued, "but we're not s' bad off on a farm." Turning to Jamie he said: "Yer a Protestant!"

"Ay."

"An' I'm a Fenian, but we're in th' face ov bigger things!"

He extended his hand. Jamie clasped it, the men looked into each other's faces and understood.

That night in the dusk, the Fenian farmer brought a sack of potatoes and a quart of fresh milk, and the spark of life was prolonged.

## CHAPTER III

### REHEARSING FOR THE SHOW

FAMINE not only carried off a million of the living, but it claimed also the unborn. Anna's second child was born a few months after the siege was broken, but the child had been starved in its mother's womb, and lived only three months. There was no wake. Wakes are for older people. There were no candles to burn, no extra sheet to put over the old dresser, and no clock to stop at the moment of death.

The little wasted thing lay in its undressed pine coffin on the table, and the neighbours came in and had a look. Custom said it should be kept the allotted time, and the tyrant was obeyed. A dozen of those to whom a wake was a means of change and recreation, came late and planted themselves for the night.

"Ye didn't haave a hard time wi' th' second, did ye, Anna?" asked Mrs. Mulholland.

"No," Anna said quietly.

"Th' hard times play'd th' devil wi' it before it was born, I'll be bound," said a second.

A third averred that the child was "the very spit of its father's mouth." Ghost stories, stories of the famine, of hard luck, of hunger, of pain, and the thousand and one aspects of social and personal sorrow had the changes rung on them.

Anna sat in the corner. She had to listen, she had to answer when directly addressed, and the prevailing idea of politeness made her the centre of every story and the object of every moral.

The refreshments were all distributed and diplomatically the mourners were informed that there was nothing more; nevertheless they stayed on and on. Nerve-racked and unstrung, Anna staggered to her feet and took Jamie to the door.

"I'll go mad, dear, if I have to stand it all night!"

They dared not be discourteous. A reputation for heartlessness would have followed Anna to the grave if she had gone to bed while the dead child lay there.

Withero had been at old William Farren's wake, and was going home when he saw Anna and Jamie at the door. They explained the situation.

"Take a dandther down toward th' church," he said "an' then come back."

Willie entered the house in an apparently breathless condition.

"Yer takin' it purty aisy here," he said, "whin' 'Jowler' Hainey's killin' his wife an' wreckin' th' house!"

In about two minutes he was alone. He put a coal in his pipe and smoked for a minute. Then he went over to the little coffin. He took his pipe out of his mouth, laid it on the mantel-shelf, and returned. The little hands were folded. He unclasped them, took one of them in his rough, calloused palm.

"Poore wee thing," he said in an undertone, "poore wee thing." He put the hands as he found them. Still looking at the little baby face, he added: "Heigho, heigho, it's bad, purty bad, but it's worse where there isn't even a dead wan!"

When Anna returned she lay down on her bed, dressed as she was, and Jamie and Withero kept the vigil—with the door barred. Next morning at the earliest respectable hour, Withero carried the little coffin under his arm, and Jamie walked beside him to the graveyard.

During the fifteen years that followed the burial

of "the famine child" they buried three others and saved three—four living and four dead.

I was the ninth child. Anna gave me a Greek name, which means "Helper of men."

Shortly after my arrival in Scott's Entry, they moved to Pogue's Entry. The stone cabin was thatch-covered, and measured about twelve by sixteen feet. The space comprised three apartments. One, a bedroom; over the bedroom and beneath the thatch a little loft that served as a bedroom to those of climbing age. The rest of it was workshop, dining-room, sitting-room, parlour, and general community news centre. The old folks slept in a bed, the rest of us slept on the floor and beneath the thatch. Between the bedroom door and the open fireplace was the chimney-corner. Near the door stood an old pine table and some dressers. They stood against the wall and were filled with crockery. We never owned a chair. There were several pine stools, a few creepies (small stools), and a long bench that ran along the bedroom wall, from the chimney-corner to the bedroom door. The mud floor never had the luxury of a covering, nor did a picture ever adorn the bare walls. When the floor needed patching, Jamie went to somebody's garden, brought a shovelful of earth, mixed it and filled the holes. The stools and creepies were scrubbed once a week, the table once a day. I could draw an outline of that old table now and accurately mark every dent and crack in it. I do not know where it came from, but each of us had a *hope* that one day we should possess a pig. We built around the *hope* a sty and placed it against the end of the cabin. The pig never turned up, but the *hope* lived there throughout a generation!

We owned a goat once. In three months it reduced the smooth kindly feeling in Pogue's Entry to the point of total eclipse. We sold it and spent a year

in winning back old friends. We had a garden. It measured thirty-six by sixteen inches, and was just outside the front window. At one end was a small currant bush and in the rest of the space Anna grew an annual crop of nasturtiums.

Once we were prosperous. That was when two older brothers worked with my father at shoemaking. I remember them, on winter nights, sitting around the big candlestick—one of the three always singing folk-songs as he worked. As they worked near the window, Anna sat in her corner and by the light of a candle in her little sconce made waxed ends for the men. I browsed among the lasts, clipping, cutting, and scratching old leather parings and dreaming of the wonderful days beyond when I too could make a boot and sing "Black-eyed Susan."

Then the news came—news of a revolution.

"They're making boots by machinery now," Anna said one day.

"It's dotin' ye are, Anna," Jamie replied. She read the account.

"How cud a machine make a boot, Anna?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I don't know, dear."

Barney McQuillan was the village authority on such things. When he told Jamie, he looked aghast, and said, "How quare!"

Then makers became menders—shoemakers became cobblers. There was something of magic and romance in the news that a machine could turn out as much work as twenty-five men, but when my brothers moved away to other parts of the world to find work, the romance was rubbed off.

"Maybe we can get a machine?" Jamie said.

"Ay, but shure ye'd have to get a factory to put it in!"

"Is that so?"

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"Ay, an' we find it hard enough t' pay fur what we're in now!"

Barney McQuillan was the master shoemaker in our town who was best able to readjust himself to changed conditions. He became a master-cobbler and doled out what he took in to men like Jamie. He kept a dozen men at work, making a little off each, just as the owner of the machine did in the factory. In each case the need of skill vanished, and the power of capital advanced. Jamie dumbly took what was left—cobblering for Barney. To Anna the whole thing meant merely the death of a few more hopes. For over twenty years she had fought a good fight, a fight in which she played a losing part, though she was never wholly defeated.

Her first fight was against slang and slovenly speech. She started early in their married life to correct Jamie. He tried hard and often, but he found it difficult to speak one language to his wife and another to his customers. From the lips of Anna it sounded all right, but the same pronunciation by Jamie seemed affected, and his customers gaped at him.

Then she directed her efforts anew to the children. One after another she corrected their grammar and pronunciation, corrected them every day and every hour of the day that they were in her presence. Here again she was doomed to failure. The children lived on the street and spoke its language. It seemed a hopeless task. She never whined over it. She was too busy cleaning, cooking, sewing and at odd times helping Jamie, but night after night for nearly a generation she took stock of a life's effort and each milestone on the way spelt failure. She could see no light—not a glimmer. Not only had she failed to impress her language upon others, but she found

herself gradually succumbing to her environment, and actually lapsing into vulgar forms herself. There was a larger and more vital conflict than the one she had lost. It was the fight against dirt. In such small quarters, with so many children and such activity in work, she fought against great odds. Bathing facilities were almost impossible: water had to be brought from the town well, except what fell on the roof, and that was saved for washing clothes. Whatever bathing there was, was done in the tub in which Jamie steeped his leather.

We children were suspicious that when Jamie bathed Anna had a hand in it. They had a joke between them that could only be explained on that basis. She called it "grooming the elephant."

"Jist wait, m' boy," she would say in a spirit of kindly banter, "till the elephant has to be groomed, and I'll bring ye down a peg or two."

There was a difference of opinion among them as to the training of children.

"No chile iver thrived on saft words," he said; "a wet welt is betther."

"Ay, yer wet welt stings th' flesh, Jamie, but it niver gets at a chile's mind."

"Thrue for you, but who th' —— kin get at a chile's mind?"

One day I was chased into the house by a bigger boy. I had found a farthing. He said it was his. The money was handed over and the boy left with his tongue in his cheek. I was ordered to strip. When ready, he laid me across his knee and applied the "wet welt."

An hour later it was discovered that a week had elapsed between the losing and finding of the farthing. No sane person would believe that a farthing could lie for a whole week on the streets of Antrim.

"Well," he said, "ye need a warmin' like that ivery day, an' ye had nown yesterday, did ye?"

On another occasion I found a ball, one that had never been lost. A boy, hoping to get me in front of my father, claimed the ball. My mother on this occasion sat in judgment.

"Where did *you* get the ball?" she asked the boy. He couldn't remember. She probed for the truth, but neither of us would give in. When all efforts failed she cut the ball in half and gave each a piece!

"Nixt time I'll tell yer Dah," the boy said, when he got outside, "he makes you squeal like a pig."

When times were good—when work and wages got a little ahead of hunger, which was seldom, Anna baked her own bread. Three kinds of bread she baked. "Soda,"—common flour bread, never in the shape of a loaf, but bread that lay flat on the girdle; "pirta oaten"—made of flour and oatmeal; and "fadge"—potato bread. She always sung while baking, and she sang the most melancholy and plaintive airs. As she baked and sang, I stood beside her on a creepie, watching the process and awaiting the end, for at the close of each batch of bread I always had my "duragh"—an extra piece.

When hunger got ahead of wages, the family bread was bought at Sam Johnson's bakery. The journey to Sam's was full of temptation to me. Hungry and with a vested interest in the loaf on my arm I was not over punctilious in details of the moral law. Anna pointed out the opportunities of such a journey. It was a chance to try my mettle with the arch temper. It was a mental gymnasium in which moral muscle got strength. There wasn't in all Ireland a mile of highway so well paved with good intentions. I used to start out, well keyed up morally and humming over and over the order of the day. When, on the home stretch, I had made a dent in Sam's

architecture, I would lay the loaf down on the table, good side toward my mother. While I was doing that she had read the story of the fall on my face. I could feel her penetrating gaze.

"So he got ye, did he?"

"Ay," I would say in a voice too low to be heard by my father.

The order at Sam's was usually a sixpenny loaf, three ha'pence worth of tea and sugar, and half an ounce of tobacco.

There were times when Barney had no work for my father, and on such occasions I came home empty-handed. Then Jamie would go out to find work as a day-labourer. Periods like these were glossed over by Anna's humour and wit. As they sat around the table, eating "stir-about" without milk, or bread without tea, Jamie would grunt and complain.

"Ay, faith," Anna would say, "it's purty bad, but it's worse where there's none at all."

When the wolf lingered long at the door I went foraging—foraging as forages a hungry dog and in the same places. Around the hovels of the poor, where dogs have clean teeth a boy has little chance. One day, having exhausted the ordinary channels of relief without success, I betook myself to the old swimming-hole on the mill race. The boys had a custom of taking a "shiverin' bite" when they went bathing. It was on a Sunday afternoon in July, and quite a crowd sat around the hole. I neither needed nor wanted a bath—I wanted a bite. No one offered a share of his crust. A big boy named Healy was telling of his prowess as a fighter.

"I'll fight ye fur a penny!" said I.

"Where's yer penny?" said Healy.

"I'll get it th' morra."

A man, seeing the difficulty and willing to invest in a scrap, advanced the wager. I was utterly out-

classed and beaten. Peeling my clothes off I went into the race for a swim and to wash the blood off. When I came out Healy had hidden my trousers. I searched for hours in vain. The man who paid the wager gave me an extra penny and I went home, holding my jacket in front of my legs. The penny saved me from a "warming," but Anna, feeling that some extra discipline was necessary, made me a pair of trousers out of an old potato-sack.

"That's sackcloth, dear," she said, "an' ye can aither sit in th' ashes in them or wear them in earning another pair! Hold fast t' yer penny!"

In this penitential outfit I had to sell my papers. Every fibre of my being tingled with shame and humiliation. I didn't complain of the penance, but I swore vengeance on Healy. She worked the desire for vengeance out of my system in her chimney-corner by reading to me often enough, so that I memorised the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Miss McGee, the postmistress, gave me sixpence for the accomplishment, and that went toward a new pair of trousers. Concerning Healy, Anna said: "Bate 'im with a betther brain, dear!"

Despite my fistic encounters, my dents in the family loaves, my shinny, my marbles, and the various signs of total, or at least partial, depravity, Anna clung to the hope that out of this thing might finally come what she was looking, praying, and hoping for.

An item on the credit side of my ledger was that I was born in a *caul*—a thin, filmy veil that covered me at birth. Of her twelve I was the only one born in "luck." In a little purse she kept the *caul*, and on special occasions she would exhibit it and enumerate the benefits and privileges that went with it. Persons born in a *caul* were immune from being

hung, drawn, and quartered, burned to death, or lost at sea.

It was on the basis of the caul I was rented to old Mary McDonagh. My duty was to meet her every Monday morning. The meeting insured her luck for the week. Mary was a huckster. She carried her shop on her arm—a wicker basket in which she had thread, needles, ribbons, and other things, which she sold to the farmers and folks away from the shopping centre. No one is lucky while bare-footed. Having no shoes, I clattered down Sandy Somerville's entry to my father's. At the first clatter, she came out, basket on arm, and said: "Morra, bhoy, God's blessin' on ye!"

"Morra, Mary, an' good luck t' ye," was my answer.

I used to express my wonder that I couldn't turn this luck of a dead-sure variety into a pair of shoes for myself.

Anna said: "Yer luck, dear, isn't in what ye can get, but in what ye can give!"

When Antrim opened its first flower show, I was a boy of all work at old Mrs. Chaine's. The gardener was pleased with my work and gave me a hothouse plant to put in competition. I carried it home proudly and laid it down beside her in the chimney-corner.

"The gerd'ner says it'll bate th' brains out on aany geranium in the show!" I said.

"Throth it will that, dear," she said, "but sure ye couldn't take a prize fur it!"

"Why?" I growled.

"Ah, honey, shure everybody would know that ye didn't grow it—forby they know that th' smoke in here would kill it in a few days."

I sulked and protested.

"That's a nice way t' throw cowld wather on th'

chile," Jamie said. "Why don't ye let 'im go on an' take his' chances at the show?"

A pained look overspread her features. It was as if he had struck her with his fist. Her eyes filled with tears, and she said huskily: "The whole world's a show, Jamie, an' this is the only place the wee fella has to rehearse in."

I sat down beside her and laid my head in her lap. She stroked it in silence for a minute or two. I couldn't quite see, however, how I could miss that show! She saw that after all I was determined to enter the lists. She offered to put a card on it for me, so that they would know the name of the owner. This is what she wrote on the card: "This plant is lent for decorative purposes."

That night there was an unusual atmosphere in her corner. She had a newly-tallied cap on her head and her little Sunday shawl over her shoulders. Her candle was burning and the hearthstones had an extra coat of whitewash. She drew me up close beside her and told me a story.

"Once, a long, long time ago, God, feelin' tired, went to sleep, an' had a nice wee nap on His throne. His head was in His han's, an' a wee white cloud came down an' covered Him up. Purty soon He wakes up, and says He: 'Where's Michael?'

"'Here I am, Father!' said Michael.

"'Michael, me boy,' says God, 'I want a chariot and a charioteer!'

"'Right ye are!' says he. Up comes the purtiest chariot in the City of Heaven an' finest charioteer.

"'Me boy,' says God, 'take a million tons ov th' choicest seeds of th' flowers of Heaven an' take a trip around th' world wi' them. Scatther them,' says He, 'be th' roadsides an' th' wild places of th' earth where my poor live.'

"'Ay,' says the charioteer, 'that's jist like ye,

Father. It's th' purtiest job of m' afther-life, an' I'll do it finely.'

" 'It's jist come t' Me in a dream,' says th' Father, 'that th' rich have all the flowers down there and th' poor haave nown at all. If a million tons isn't enough take a billion tons!'"

At this point I got in some questions about God's language and the kind of flowers.

"Well, dear," she said, "He spakes Irish t' Irish people, and the charioteer was an Irishman."

"Maybe it was a wuman!" I ventured.

"Ay, but there's no difference up there."

"Th' flowers," she said, "were primroses, butther-cups, an' daisies, an' th' flowers that be handy t' th' poor, an' from that day to this there's been flowers a-plenty for all of us everywhere!"

"Now you go to-morra an' gether a basketful, an' we'll fix them up in th' shape of th' Pyramid of Egypt, an' maybe ye'll get a prize."

I spent the whole of the following day, from dawn to dark, roaming over the wild places near Antrim gathering the flowers of the poor. My mother arranged them in a novel bouquet—a bouquet of wild flowers, the base of it yellow primroses, the apex of pink shepherd's sundials, and between the base and the apex one of the greatest variety of wild flowers ever gotten together in that part of the world.

It created a sensation and took first prize. At the close of the exhibition Mrs. James Chaine distributed the prizes. When my name was called I went forward slowly, blushing in my rags, and received a twenty-four piece set of china! It gave me a fit! I took it home, put it in her lap, and danced. We held open house for a week, so that every man, woman, and child in the community could come in and "handle" it.

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Withero said we ought to save up and build a house to keep it in!

She thought that a propitious time to explain the inscription she put on the card.

"Ah, thin," I said, "shure it's thrue what ye always say."

"What's that, dear?"

"It's nice t' be nice."

## CHAPTER IV

### SUNDAY IN POGUE'S ENTRY

JAMIE and Anna kept the Sabbath. It was a habit with them and the children got it, one after another, as they came along. When the town clock struck twelve on Saturday night, the week's work was done. The customers were given fair warning that at the hour of midnight the bench would be put away until Monday morning. There was nothing theological about the observance. It was a custom, not a code. Anna looked upon it as an over-punctilious notion. More than once she was heard to say: "The Sabbath was made for maan, Jamie, and not maan for th' Sabbath."

His answer had brevity and point. "I don't care a d——n what it was made for, Anna, I'll quit at twelve." And he quit.

Sometimes Anna would take an unfinished job and finish it herself. There were things in cobbling she could do as well as Jamie. Her defence of doing it in the early hours of the Sabbath was: "Sure God has more important work to do than to sit up late to watch us mend the boots of the poor, forby it's better to haave ye're boots mended an' go to church than to sit in th' ashes on Sunday an' swallow the smoke of bad turf!"

"Ay," Jamie would say, "it's jist wondtherful what ye can do if we haave th' right kind of a conscience!"

Jamie's first duty on Sunday was to clean out the thrush's cage. He was very proud of Dicke, and gave him a bath every morning and a house-cleaning on Sunday. We children loved Sunday. On that day

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Anna reigned. She wore her little shawl over her shoulders and her hair was enclosed in a newly-tallied white cap. She smoked little, but on Sundays after dinner she always had her "dhraw" with Jamie. Anna's Sunday chore was to whitewash the hearth-stones and clean the house. When the table was laid for Sunday breakfast and the kettle hung on the chain singing and Anna was in her glory of white linen, the children were supremely happy. In the wildest dreams there was nothing quite as beautiful as that. Whatever hunger, disappointment, or petty quarrel happened during the week, it was forgotten on Sunday. It was a day of supreme peace.

Sunday breakfast was what she called a "puttiby," something light to tide them over until dinner-time. Dinner was the big meal of the week. At every meal I sat beside my mother. If we had stir-about, I was favoured, but not enough to arouse jealousy: I scraped the pot. If it was "tay," I got a few bits of the crust of Anna's bread. We called it "scroof."

About ten o'clock the preparations for the big dinner began. We had meat once a week. At least it was the plan to have it so often. Of course, there were times when the plan didn't work, but when it did, Sunday was meat day. The word "meat" was never used. It was "kitchen" or "beef." Both words meant the same thing, and bacon might be meant by either of them.

In nine cases out of ten, Sunday "kitchen" was a cow's head, a "calf's head and pluck," a pair of cow's feet, a few sheep's "trotters," or a quart of sheep's blood. Sometimes it was the entrails of a pig. Only when there was no money for "kitchen" did we have blood. It was at first fried and then made part of the broth.

The broth-pot on Sunday was the centre. The economic status of a family could be as easily gauged

by tasting their broth as by counting the weekly income. Big money, good broth; little money, thin broth. The slimmer the resource the fewer the ingredients. The pot was an index to every condition and the talisman of every family. It was an opportunity to show off. When Jamie donned a "dickey" once to attend a funeral and came home with it in his pocket, no comment was made; but if Anna made poor broth it was the talk of the entry for a week.

Good broth consisted of "kitchen," barley, greens, and lithing. Next to "kitchen" barley was the most expensive ingredient. Folks in Pogue's Entry didn't always have it, but there were a number of cheap substitutes, such as hard peas or horse beans. Amongst half a dozen families in and around the entry there was a broth exchange. Each family made a few extra quarts and exchanged them. They were distributed in quart tin cans. Each can was emptied, washed, refilled, and returned. Ann O'Hare, the chimney-sweep's wife, was usually first on hand. She had the unenviable reputation of being the "dhirtiest craither" in the community. Jamie called her "Sooty Ann."

"There's a gey good smell from yer pot, Anna," she said; "what haave ye in it th' day?"

"Oh, jist a few sheep's throtters and a wheen of nettles."

"Who gethered th' nettles?"

Anna pointed to me.

"Did th' sting bad, me boughal?"

"Ded no, not aany," I said.

"Did ye squeeze thim tigh?"

"I put m' Dah's socks on m' han's."

"Ah, that's a good thrick."

Ann had a mouth that looked like a torn pocket. She could pucker it into the queerest shapes. She

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smacked her thin blue lips, puckered her mouth a number of times while Anna emptied and refilled the can.

"If this is as good as it smells," she said, as she went out, "I'll jist sup it myself, and let oul' Billy go chase himself!"

Jamie was the family connoisseur in matters relating to broth. He tasted Ann's. The family waited for the verdict.

"Perty good barley an' lithin'," he said, "but it smells like Billy's oul' boots."

"Shame on ye, Jamie," Anna said.

"Well, give us your high falutin' opinion ov it!"

Anna sipped a spoonful and remarked: "It might be worse."

"Ay, it's worse where ther's nown, but on yer oath, now, d'ye think Sooty Ann washed her han's?"

"Good clane dhirt will poison no one, Jamie."

"Thru, but this isn't clane dhirt, it's soot—bitther soot!"

It was agreed to pass the O'Hare delectation. When it cooled I quietly gave it to my friend Rover—Mrs. Lorimer's dog.

Hen Cassidy came next. Hen's mother was a widow who lived on the edge of want. Hen and I did a little barter and exchange on the side, while Anna emptied and refilled his can. He had scarcely gone when the verdict was rendered:—

"Bacon an' nettles," Jamie said, "she's as hard up as we are, this week!"

"Poor craither," Anna said; "I wondther if she's got aanything besides broth?"

Nobody knew. Anna thought she knew a way to find out.

"Haave ye aany marbles, dear?" she asked me.

"Ay, a wheen."

"Wud ye give a wheen to me?"

"Ay, are ye goin' t' shoot awhile? If ye are I'll give ye half an' shoot ye fur thim!" I said.

"No, I jist want t' borra some."

I handed out a handful of marbles.

"Now don't glunch, dear, when I tell ye what I want thim fur."

I promised.

"Whistle fur Hen," she said, "and give him that han'ful of marbles if he'll tell ye what his mother haas fur dinner th' day."

I whistled and Hen responded.

"I'll bate ye two chanies, Hen, that I know what ye've got fur dinner!"

"I'll bate ye!" said Hen, "show yer chanies!"

"Show yours!" said I.

Hen had none, but I volunteered to trust him.

"Go on now, guess!" said he.

"Pirtas an' broth!" said I.

"Yer blinked, ye cabbage head, we've got two yards ov thripe forby!"

I carried two quarts to as many neighbours. Mary carried three. As they were settling down to dinner Arthur Gainer arrived with his mother's contribution. Jamie sampled it and laughed outright.

"An' oul' cow put 'er feet in it," he said. Anna took a taste.

"She didn't keep it in long aither," was her comment.

"D'ye iver mind seein' barley in Gainer's broth?" Jamie asked.

"I haave no recollection."

"If there isn't a kink in m' power of remembrance," Jamie said, "they've had nothin' but bacon an' nettles since th' big famine."

"What did th' haave before that?" Anna asked.

"Bacon an' nettles," he said.

"Did ye ever think, Jamie, how like folks are to th' broth they make?"

"No," he said, "but there's no raisin why people should sting jist because they've got nothin' but nettles in their broth!"

The potatoes were emptied out of their pot on the bare table, my father encircling it with his arms to prevent them from rolling off. A little pile of salt was placed beside each person, and each had a big bowl full of broth. The different kinds had lost their identity in the common pot.

In the midst of the meal came visitors.

"Much good may it do ye!" said Billy Baxter, as he walked in with his hands in his pockets.

"Thank ye, Billy, haave a good bowl of broth!"

"Thank ye, thank ye," he said. "I don't mind a good bowl ov broth, Anna, but I'd prefer a bowl—jist a bowl of good broth!"

"Ye've had larks for breakvist surely, haaven't ye, Billy?" Anna said.

"No, I didn't, but there's a famine of good broth these days. When I was young we had the rale McKie!"

Billy took a bowl, nevertheless, and went to Jamie's bench to "sup" it.

Eliza Wallace, the fish woman, came in.

"Much good may it do ye," she said.

"Thank ye kindly, Liza; sit down an' haave a bowl of broth!"

It was baled out, and Eliza sat down on the floor near the window.

McGrath, the rag man, "dhrapped in."

"Much good may it do ye!" he said.

"Thank ye kindly, Tom," Anna said, "ye'll surely have a bowl of broth."

"Jist wan spoonful," McGrath said.

I emptied my bowl at a nod from Anna, rinsed it

out the tub, and filled it with broth. McGrath sat on the doorstep.

After the dinner Anna read a story from the *Weekly Budget*, and the family and guests sat around and listened. Then came the weekly function, over which there invariably arose an altercation amongst the children. It was the Sunday visit of the Methodist tract distributor—Miss Clarke. It was not an unmixed dread, for sometimes she brought a good story and the family enjoyed it. The usual row took place as to who should go to the door and return the tract. It was finally decided that I should face the ordeal. My preparation was to wash my feet, rake my hair into order, and soap it down, cover up a few holes, and await the gentle knock on the door-post. It came, and I bounded to the door, tract in hand.

"Good-afternoon," she began, "did your mother read the tract this week?"

"Yis, mem, an' she says it's fine."

"Do you remember the name of it?"

"'Get yer own Cherries,'" said I.

"*B-u-y*," came the correction in clear tones from behind the partition.

"'Buy yer own Cherries,' it is, mem."

"That's better," the lady said. "Some people *get* cherries, other people *buy* them."

"Ay."

I never bought any. I knew every wild-cherry tree within twenty miles of Antrim.

The lady saw an opening and went in.

"Did you ever get caught?" she asked.

I hung my head. Then followed a brief lecture on private property—brief, for it was cut short by Anna, who, without any apology or introduction, said, as she confronted the slum evangel: "Is God our Father?"

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"Yes, indeed," the lady answered.

"An' we are all His childther?"

"Assuredly."

"Would ye starve yer brother Tom?"

"Of course not."

"But ye don't mind s' much th' starvation of all yer other wee brothers an' sisters on th' streets, do ye?'"

There was a commotion behind the paper partition. The group stood in breathless silence until the hunger question was put, then they "dunched" each other and made faces. My father took a handful of my hair, and gave it a good-natured but vigorous tug to prevent an explosion.

"Oh, Anna!" she said, "you are mistaken; I would starve nobody—and far be it from me to accuse—"

"Accuse," said Anna, raising her gentle voice. "Why, acushla, nobody needs t' accuse th' poor; th' guilty need no accuser. We're convicted by bein' poor, by bein' born poor an' dying poor, aren't we, now?"

"With the Lord there is neither rich nor poor, Anna."

"Ay, an' that's no' news to me, but with good folks like you it's different."

"No, indeed, I assure you I think that exactly."

"Well, now, if it makes no diff'rence, dear, why do ye come down Pogue's Entry like a bailiff or a process-sarver?"

"I didn't, I just hinted—"

"Ay, ye hinted, an' a wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse. Now tell me truly, an' cross yer heart—wud ye go to Ballycraigie doore an' talk t' wee Willie Chaine as ye talked t' my bhoy jist now?"

"No—"

"No, deed ye wudn't, for th' wudn't let ye, but because we've no choice ye come down here like a

petty sessions-magistrate an' make my bhoy feel like a thief because he goes like a crow an' picks a wild cherry or a sloe that wud rot on the tree. D'ye know Luke thirteen an' nineteen?"

The lady opened her Bible, but before she found the passage Anna was reading from her old yellow, backless Bible about the birds that lodged in the branches of the trees.

"Did they pay aany rent?" she asked, as she closed the book. "Did th' foxes have leases fur their holes?"

"No."

"No, indeed, an' d'ye think He cares less fur boys than birds?"

"Oh, no."

"Oh, no, an' ye know rightly that everything aroun' Antrim is jist a demesne full o' pheasants an' rabbits for them quality t' shoot, an' we git thransported if we get a male whin we're hungry!"

The lady was tender-hearted and full of sympathy, but she hadn't travelled along the same road as Anna and didn't know. Behind the screen the group was jubilant, but when they saw the sympathy on the tract woman's face they sobered and looked sad.

"I must go," she said, "and God bless you, Anna."

And Anna replied, "God bless you kindly, dear."

When Anna went behind the screen Jamie grabbed her and pressed her closely to him. "Ye're a match for John Rae any day, ye are that, woman!"

The kettle was lowered to the burning turf and there was a round of tea. The children and visitors sat on the floor.

"Now that ye're in sich fine fettle, Anna," Jamie said, "jist toss th' cups for us!"

She took her own cup, gave it a peculiar twist, and placed it mouth down on the saucer. Then she took it up and examined it quizzically. The leaves straggled hieroglyphically over the inside. The group

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got their heads together and looked with serious faces at the cap.

"There's a ship comin' across th' sea—an' I see a letter!"

"It's for me, I'll bate," Jamie said.

"No, dear, it's fur me."

"Take it," Jamie said, "it's maybe a dispossess from oul' Savage th' landlord!"

She took Jamie's cup.

"There's a wee bit of a garden wi' a fence aroun' it."

"Wud that be Savage givin' us a bit of groun' next year t' raise pirtas?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe we're goin' t' flit, where there's a perch or two wi' th' house!"

A low whistle outside attracted my attention and I stole quietly away. It was Sonny Johnson, the baker's son, and he had a little bundle under his arm. We boys were discussing a very serious proposition when Anna appeared on the scene.

"Morra, Sonny!"

"Morra, Anna!"

"Aany day but Sunday he may go, dear, but not th' day."

That was all that was needed. Sonny wanted me to take him bird-nesting. He had the price in the bundle.

"If I give ye this *now*," he said, "will ye come some other day fur nothin'?"

"Ay."

In the bundle was a "bap"—a diamond-shaped, flat, penny piece of bread. I rejoined the cup-tossers.

Another whistle. "That's Arthur," Anna said. "No shinny th' day, mind ye."

I joined Arthur and we sat on the wall of Gainer's pigsty. We hadn't been there long when "Chisty"

McDowell, the superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School, was seen over in Scott's garden rounding up his scholars. We were in his line of vision and he made for us. We saw him coming, and hid in the inner sanctum of the sty. The pig was in the little outer yard. "Chisty" was a wiry little man of great zeal but little humour. It was his minor talent that came into play on this occasion, however.

"Come, boys, come," he said, "I know ye're in there. We've got a beautiful lesson to-day."

We crouched in a corner, still silent.

"Come, boys," he urged, "don't keep me waiting. The lesson is about the Prodigal Son."

"Say somethin', Arthur," I urged.

He did.

"T' h——l wi' the Prodigal Son!" he said, whereupon the little man jumped the low wall into the outer yard and drove the big, grunting, wallowing sow in on top of us! Our yells could be heard a mile away. We came out and were collared and taken off to Sunday School.

When I returned, the cups were all tossed, and the visitors had gone, but Willie Withero had dropped in and was invited to "stap" for tea. He was our most welcome visitor, and there was but one house where he felt at home.

"Tay" that evening consisted of "stir-about," Sonny Johnson's unearned bap and buttermilk.

Willie made more noise "suppin'" his stir-about than Jamie did, and I said: "Did ye iver hear ov th' cow that got her foot stuck in a bog, Willie?"

"No, boy, what did she do?"

"She got it out!"

A stern look from Jamie prevented the application.

"Tell me, Willie," Anna said, "is it thrue that ye can blink a cow so that she can give no milk at all?"

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"It's jist a hoax, Anna, some oul' bitch said it an' th' others cackle it from doore to doore. I've naither wife nor wain, chick nor chile, I ate th' bread ov loneliness an' keep m' own company, an' jist bekase I don't blether wi' th' gossoons, th' think I'm uncanny. Isn't that it, Jamie—eh?"

"Ay, ye're right, Willie, it's quare what bletherin' fools there are in this town!"

Willie held his full spoon in front of his mouth while he replied: "It's you that's the dacent maan, Jamie, 'deed it is."

"The crocks are empty, dear," Anna said to me.

After "tay," to the town well I went for the night's supply of water. When I returned the dishes were washed and on the dresser. The floor was swept and the family were swappin' stories with Withero. Sunday was ever the day of Broth and Romance. Anna made the best broth and told the best stories. No Sunday was complete without a good story. On the doorstep that night she told one of her best. As she finished, the church bell tolled the curfew. Then the days of the month were tolled off.

"Sammy's arm is gey strhong th' night," Willie said.

"Ay," Jamie said, "an' th' oul' bell's got a fine ring."

## CHAPTER V

### HIS ARM IS NOT SHORTENED

WHEN Anna had to choose between love and religion—the religion of an institution—she chose love. Her faith in God remained unshaken, but her methods of approach were the forms of love rather than the symbols or ceremonies of a sect. Twelve times in a quarter of a century she appeared publicly in the parish church. Each time it was to lay on the altar of religion the fruit of her love. Nine-tenths of those twelve congregations would not have known her if they had met her on the street. One-tenth were those who occupied the charity pews.

Religion in our town had arrayed the inhabitants into two hostile camps. She never had any sympathy with the fight. She was neutral. She pointed out to the fanatics around her that the basis of religion was love, and that religion that expressed itself in faction fights must have hate at the bottom of it, not love. She had a philosophy of religion that *worked*. To the sects it would have been rank heresy, but the sects didn't know she existed, and those who were benefited by her quaint and unique application of religion to life were almost as obscure as she was. I was the first to discover her "heresy" and oppose it. She lived to see me repent of my folly.

In a town of two thousand people less than two hundred were familiar with her face, and half of them knew her because at one time or another they had been to "Jamie's" to have their shoes made or mended, or because they lived in our immediate

vicinity. Of the hundred who knew her face, less than half of them were familiar enough to call her "Anna." Of all the people who had lived in Antrim as long as she had, she was the least known.

No feast or function could budge her out of her corner. There came a time when her family became as accustomed to her refusal as she had to her environment and we ceased to coax or urge her. She never attended a picnic, a soiree, or a dance in Antrim. One big opportunity for social intercourse amongst the poor is a wake—she never attended a wake. She often took entire charge of a wake for a neighbour, but she directed the affair from her corner.

She had a slim sort of acquaintance with three intellectual men. They were John Galt, William Green, and John Gordon Holmes, vicars in that order of the parish of Antrim. They visited her once a year and at funerals—the funerals of her own dead. None of them knew her. They hadn't time, but there were members of our own family who knew as little of her mind as they did.

She did not seek obscurity. It seemed to have sought and found her. One avenue of escape after another was closed, and she settled down at last to her lot in the chimney-corner. Her hopes, beliefs, and aspirations were expressed in what she did rather than in what she said, though she said much, much that is still treasured, long after she has passed away.

Henry Lecky was a young fisherman on Lough Neagh. He was a great favourite with the children of the entries. He loved to bring us a small trout each when he returned after a long fishing trip. He died suddenly, and Eliza, his mother, came at once for help to the chimney-corner.

"He's gone, Anna, he's gone!" she said, as she dropped on the floor beside Anna.

"An' ye want me t' do fer yer dead what ye'd do or mine, 'Liza?"

"Ay, ay, Anna, yer God's angel to yer frien's."

"Go an fetch 'Liza Conlon, Jane Burrows, and Marget Houston!" was Anna's order to Jamie.

The women came at once. The plan was outlined, he labour apportioned, and they went to work. Jamie went for the carpenter and hired William Gainer to dig the grave. Eliza Conlon made the hroud, Jane Burrows and Ann washed and laid out the corpse, and Mrs. Houston kept Eliza in Ann's bed until the preliminaries for the wake were completed.

"Ye can go now, Mrs. Houston," Anna said, "an' I'll mind 'Liza."

"The light's gone out o' m' home, an' darkness ills m' heart, Anna, an' it's the sun that'll shine for n' no more! Ochone, ochone!"

"Liza, dear, I've been where ye are now, too often not t' know that aanything that anybody says is jist like spittin' at a burnin' house t' put it out. Yer boy's gone—we can't bring 'im back. Fate's cut yer heart in two, an' oul Docther Time an' the care of God are about the only shure cures goin'."

"Cudn't the minister help a little if he was here, Anna?"

"If ye think so, I'll get him, 'Liza!"

"He might put th' love of God in me!"

"Puttin' th' love of God in ye isn't like stuffin' yer mouth with a pirta, 'Liza!"

"That's so, it is, but he might thry, Anna!"

"Well, ye'll haave 'im."

Mr. Green came and gave 'Liza what consolation he could. He read the appropriate prayer, repeated the customary words. He did it all in a tender tone and departed.

"Ye feel fine afther that, don't ye, 'Liza?"

"Ay, but Henry's dead, an' will no come back!"

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"Did ye expect Mr. Green t' bring 'im?"

"No."

"What did ye expect, 'Liza?"

"I dunno."

"Shure ye don't. Ye didn't expect aanything, an' ye got jist what ye expected. Ah, wuman, God isn't a printed book t' be carried aroun' b' a man in fine clothes, nor a gold cross t' be danglin' at the watch chain ov a priest."

"What is He, Anna, yer wiser nor me; tell a poor craither in throuble, do?"

"If ye'll lie very quiet, 'Liza—jist cross yer hands and listen—if ye do, I'll thry!"

"Ay, bless ye, I'll blirt no more; go on!"

"Wee Henry is over there in his shroud, isn't he?"

"Ay, God rest his soul."

"He'll rest Henry's, 'Liza, but He'll haave the devil's own job wi' yours if ye don't help 'im."

"Och, ay, thin I'll be at pace."

"As I was sayin', Henry's body is jist as it was yesterday, han's, legs, heart, an' head, aren't they?"

"Ay, cept cold and stiff."

"What's missing, then?"

"His blessed soul, God love it."

"That's right. Now, when the spirit laves th' body we say th' body's dead, but it's jist a partnership gone broke, wan goes up an' wan goes down. I've always thot that kissin' a corpse was like kissin' a cage whin the bird's dead—*there's nothin' in it*. Now answer me this, 'Liza Lecky. Is Henry a livin' spirit or a dead body?"

"A livin' spirit, God prosper it."

"Ay, an' God is th' same kind, but Henry's can be at but wan point at once, while God's is everywhere at once. He's so big He can cover the world, an' so small He can get in be a crack in th' glass or a kayhole."

"I've got four panes broke, Anna!"

"Well, they're jist like four doores."

"Feeries can come in that way, too."

"Ay, but feeries can't sew up a broken heart, acushila."

"Where's Henry's soul, Anna?" Eliza asked, as if the said soul was a navvy over whom Anna stood as gaffer.

"It may be here at yer bedhead now, but yer more in need of knowin' where God's Spirit is, 'Liza."

Jamie entered with a cup of tea.

"For a throubled heart," he said, "there's nothin' in this world like a rale good cup o' tay."

"God bless ye kindly, Jamie, I've a sore heart, an' I'm as dhry as a whistle."

"Now, Jamie, put th' cups down on th' bed," Anna said, "an' then get out, like a good bhoyle!"

"I want a crack wi' Anna, Jamie," Eliza said.

"Well, ye'll go farther an' fare worse—she's a biffer at that!"

Eliza sat up in bed while she drank the tea. When she drained her cup she handed it over to Anna.

"Toss it, Anna, maybe there's good luck in it fur me."

"No, dear, it's a hoax at best; jist now it wud be pure blasphemy. Ye don't need luck, ye need at this minute th' help of God."

"Och, ay, ye're right; jist talk t' me ov Him."

"I was talkin' about His Spirit when Jamie came in."

"Ay."

"It comes in as many ways as there's need fur its comin', an that's quite a wheen."

"God knows."

"Ye'll haave t' be calm, dear, before He'd come t' ye in aany way."

"Ay, but I'm at pace now, Anna, amn't I?"

"Well, now, get out here an' get down on th' floor on yer bare knees and haave a talk wi 'Im."

Eliza obeyed implicitly. Anna knelt beside her.

"I don't know what t' say."

"Say afther me," and Anna told of an empty home and a sore heart. When she paused, Eliza groaned.

"Now tell 'Im to lay 'Is hand on yer tired head in token that He's wi' ye in yer distress!"

Even to a dull intellect like Eliza's the suggestion was startling.

"Wud He do it, Anna?"

"Well, jist ask 'Im an' then wait an' see!"

In faltering tones Eliza made her request and waited. As gently as falls an autumn leaf Anna laid her hand on Eliza's head, held it there for a moment and removed it.

"Oh, oh, oh, He's done it, Anna, He's done it, glory be t' God, He's done it!"

"Rise up, dear," Anna said, "an' tell me about it."

"There was a nice feelin' went down through me, Anna, an' th' han' was jist like yours!"

"The han' was mine, but it was God's too." Anna wiped her spectacles and took Eliza over close to the window while she read a text of the Bible. "Listen, dear," Anna said, "'God's arm is not shortened.' Did ye think that an arm could be stretched from beyond th' clouds t' Pogue's Entry?"

"Ay."

"No, dear, but God takes a han' wherever He can find it, and jist diz what He likes wi' it. Sometimes He takes a bishop's and lays it on a child's head in benediction, then He takes the han' of a docther t' relieve pain, th' han' of a mother t' guide her chile, an' sometimes He takes th' han' of an aul' craither like me t' give a bit comfort to a neighbour. But

they're all han's touch't be His Spirit, an' His Spirit is everywhere lukin' for han's to use."

Eliza looked at her open-mouthed for a moment.

"Tell me, Anna," she said, as she put her hands on her shoulders, "was th' han' that bro't home trouts fur th' childther God's han' too?"

"Ay, 'deed it was."

"Oh, glory be t' God—thin I'm at pace—isn't it gran' t' think on—isn't it now?"

Eliza Conlon abruptly terminated the conversation by announcing that all was ready for the wake.

"Ah, but it's the purty corpse he is," she said, "—luks jist like life!"

The three women went over to the Lecky home. It was a one-room place. The big bed stood in the corner. The corpse was "laid out" with the hands clasped.

The moment Eliza entered she rushed to the bed and fell on her knees beside it. She was quiet, however, and after a moment's pause she raised her head and laying a hand on the folded hands, said: "Ah, han's ov God t' be so cold an' still!"

Anna stood beside her until she thought she had stayed long enough, then led her gently away. From that moment Anna directed the wake and the funeral from her chimney-corner.

"Here's a basket ov flowers for Henry, Anna, the childther gethered them th' day," Maggie McKinstry said, as she laid them down on the hearthstones beside Anna.

"Ye've got some time, Maggie?"

"Oh, ay."

"Make a chain ov them an' let it go all th' way arooun' th' body, they'll look purty that way, don't ye think so?"

"Illigant, indeed, to be shure! 'Deed I'll do it." And it was done.

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To Eliza Conlon was given the task of providing refreshments. I say "task," for after the carpenter was paid for the coffin and Jamie Scott for the hearse there was only six shillings left.

"Get whey for th' childther," Anna said, and "childther" in this catalogue ran up into the twenties.

For the older "childther" there was something from Mrs. Lorimer's public-house—something that was kept under cover and passed around late, and later still diluted and passed around again. Concerning this item Anna said: "Wather it well, dear, an' save in their wits; they've got little enough now, God save us all!"

"Anna," said Sam Johnson, "I am told you have charge of Henry's wake. Is there anything I can do?"

Sam was the tall, imperious precentor of the Mill Row meeting-house. He was also the chief baker of the town, and "looked up to" in matters relating to morals as well as loaves.

"Mister Gwynn has promised t' read a chapther, Mister Johnson. He'll read, maybe, the fourteenth of John. If he diz, tell him t' go aisy over th' twelfth verse an' explain that th' works He did can be done in Antrim by any poor craither who's got th' Spirit."

Sam straightened up to his full height and in measured words said: "Ye know, no doubt, Anna, that Misther Gwynn is a Churchman an' I'm a Presbyterian. He wouldn't take kindly to a hint from a Mill Row maan, I fear, especially on a disputed text."

"Well, dear knows if there's aanything this oul' world needs more than another, it's an undisputed text. Couldn't ye find us wan, Misther Johnson?"

"All texts are disputed," he said, "but there are texts not in dispute."

"I think I could name wan at laste, Misther Johnson."

"Maybe."

"Deed, no maybe at all, but *surebe*. Jamie, dear, get m' th' Bible, if ye plaze."

While Jamie got the Bible she wiped her glasses and complained in a gentle voice about the "mortal pity of it" that texts were pins for Christians to stick in each other's flesh.

"Here it is," she said, "'Th' poor ye haave always with ye.'"

"Ay," Sam said, "an' how true it is."

"Deed it's true, but who did He mane by 'ye'?"

"Th' world, I suppose."

"Not all th' world, by a spoonful, but a wheen of them like Sandy Somerville, who's got a signboard in front of his back that tells he ates too much while the rest of us haave backbones that could as aisily be felt before as behine!"

"So that's what you call an *undisputed* text?"

She looked over the rim of her spectacles at him for a moment in silence, and then said slowly: "Ochone—w-e-l-l—tell Mister Gwynn t' read what he likes, it'll mane th' same aanyway."

Kitty Coyle came in. Henry and she were engaged. They had known each other since childhood. Her eyes were red with weeping. Henry's mother led her by the arm.

"Anna, dear," Eliza said, "she needs ye as much as me. Give 'er a bit ov comfort."

They went into the little bedroom and the door was shut. Jamie stood as sentry.

When they came out young Johnny Murdock, Henry's chum, was sitting on Jamie's workbench.

"I want ye t' take good care of Kitty th' night, Johnny. Keep close t' 'er, and when th' moon comes

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out take 'er down the garden t' get fresh air. It'll be stuffy wi' all th' people an' the corpse in Lecky's."

"Ay," he said, "I'll do all I can."

To Kitty she said, "I've asked Johnny t' keep gey close t' ye till it's all over, Kitty. Ye'll understand."

"Ay," Kitty said, "Henry loved 'im more'n aany maan on th' Lough!"

"Had tay yit?" Willie Withero asked, as he blundered in on the scene.

"No, Willie, 'deed we haaven't thought ov it!"

"Well, t' haave yer bowels think yer throat's cut isn't sauncy!" he said.

The fire was low and the kettle cold.

"Here, Johnny," Withero said, "jist run over t' Farren's for a ha porth ov turf an' we'll haave a cup of tay fur these folks who're workin' overtime palaverin' about th' dead! Moses alive, wan corpse is enough fur a week or two—don't kill us all entirely!"

Shortly after midnight Anna went over to see how things were at the wake. They told her of the singing of the children, of the beautiful chapter by Misther Gwynn, and the "feelin'" prayer by Graham Shannon. The whey was sufficient and nearly everybody had "a dhrap o' th' craither" and a bite of fadge.

"Ah, Anna dear," Eliza said, "shure it's yerself that knows how t' make a moi'ty go th' longest distance over dhry throats an' empty stomachs! 'Deed it was a revival an' a faste in wan, an' th' only pity is that poor Henry cudn't enjoy it!"

The candles were burned low in the sconces, the flowers around the corpse had faded, a few tongues, loosened by stimulation, were still wagging, but the laughter had died down and the stories were all told. There had been a hair-rising ghost story that had sent a dozen home before the *respectable* time of

departure. The empty stools had been carried outside and were largely occupied by lovers.

Anna drew Eliza's head to her breast, and pressing it gently to her, said, "I'm proud of ye, dear, ye've borne up bravely! Now I'm goin' t' haave a few winks in th' corner, for there'll be much to do the morra."

Scarcely had the words died on her lips when Kitty Coyle gave vent to a scream of terror that brought the mourners to the door and terrified those outside.

"What ails ye, in the name of God?" Anna asked.

She was too terrified to speak at once. The mourners crowded closely together.

"Watch!" Kitty said, as she pointed with her finger toward Conlon's pigsty. Johnny Murdock had his arm around Kitty's waist to keep her steady and assure her of protection. They watched and waited. It was a bright moonlight night, and save for the deep shadows of the houses and hedges, as clear as day. Tensely nerve-strung, open-mouthed, and wild-eyed, stood the group, for what seemed to them hours. In a few minutes a white figure was seen emerging from the pigsty. The watchers were transfixed in terror. Most of them clutched at each other nervously. Old Mrs. Houston the midwife, who had told the ghost story at the wake, dropped in a heap. Peter Hennen and Jamie Wilson carried her indoors.

The white figure stood on the pathway leading through the gardens for a moment, and then returned to the sty. Most of the watchers fled to their homes. Some didn't move, because they had lost the power to do so. Others just stood.

"It's a hoax an' a joke," Anna said. "Now wan of you men go down there an' see!"

No one moved. Every eye was fixed on the pigsty. A long-drawn-out, mournful cry was heard. It was

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all that tradition had described as the cry of the Banshee.

"The Banshee it is! Ah, merciful God, which ov us is t' b' tuk, I wondher?" It was Eliza who spoke, and she continued, directing her talk to Anna, "An' it's th' long arm ov th' Almighty it is raychin' down t' give us a warnin', don't ye think so now, Anna?"

"If it's wan arm of God, I know where th' other is, 'Liza!" Addressing the terror-stricken watchers, Anna said: "Stand here, don't budge, wan of ye!"

Along the sides of the houses in the deep shadow Anna walked until she got to the end of the row; just around the corner stood the sty. In the shadow she stood with her back to the wall and waited. The watchers were breathless and what they saw a minute later gave them a syncope of the heart that they never forgot. They saw the white figure emerge again and they saw Anna stealthily approach and enter into what they thought was a struggle with it. They gasped when they saw her a moment later bring the white figure along with her. As she came nearer it looked limp and pliable, for it hung over her arm.

"It's that divil, Ben Green!" she said, as she threw a white sheet at their feet.

"Hell roast 'im on a brandther!" said one.

"The divil gut 'im like a herrin'!" said another.

Four of the younger men, having been shamed by their own cowardice, made a raid on the sty, and next day when Ben came to the funeral he looked very much the worse for wear.

Ben was a friend of Henry's and a good deal of a practical joker. Anna heard of what happened, and she directed that he be one of the four men to lower the coffin into the grave, as a moiety of consolation. Johnny Murdock made strenuous objections to this.

"Why?" Anna asked.

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"Bekase," he said, "shure th' divil nearly kilt  
Kitty be th' fright."

"But she was purty comfortable th' rest of th'  
time?"

"Oh, ay."

"Ye lifted a gey big burden froin 'er heart last  
night, didn't ye, Johnny?"

"Ay; an' if ye won't let on, I'll tell ye, Anna." He  
came close and whispered into her ear: "Am goin'  
t' thry danged hard t' take th' heart as well as th'  
throuble!"

"What diz Kitty think?"

"She's switherin'."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE APOTHEOSIS OF HUGHIE THORNTON

ANNA was an epistle to Pogue's Entry, and my only excuse for dragging Hughie Thornton into this narrative is that he was a commentary on Anna. He was only once in our house, but that was an "occasion," and for many years we dated things that happened about that time as "about," "before," or "after" "the night Hughie stayed in the pigsty."

We lived in the social cellar; Hughie led a precarious existence in the *sub-cellars*. He was the beggar-man of several towns, of which Antrim was the largest. He was a short, thick-set man with a pock-marked face, eyes like a mouse, eyebrows that looked like well-worn scrubbing brushes, and a beard cropped close with scissors or a knife. He wore two coats, two pairs of trousers, and several waistcoats—all at the same time, winter and summer. His old battered hat looked like a crow's nest. His wardrobe was so elaborately patched that practically nothing at all of the originals remained; even then patches of his old, withered skin could be seen at various angles. The thing that attracted my attention more than anything else about him was his pockets. He had dozens of them, and they were always full of bread crusts, scraps of meat, and cooking utensils, for like a snail he carried his domicile on his back. His boots looked as if a blacksmith had made them, and for whangs (laces) he used strong wire.

He was pre-eminently a citizen of the world. He had not lived in a house in half a century. A hay-

stack in summer, and a pigsty in winter sufficed him. He had a deep graphophone voice, and when he spoke the sound was like the creaking of a barn door on rusty hinges. When he came to town he was to us what a circus is to boys of more highly favoured communities. There were several interpretations of Hughie. One was that he was a "sent back." That is, he had gone to the gates of a less cumbersome life and Peter or the porter at the other gate had sent him back to perform some unfulfilled task. Another was that he was a nobleman of an anciernt line who was wandering over the earth in disguise in search of the Grail. A third, and the most popular one, was that he was just a common beggar, and an unmitigated liar. The second interpretation was made more plausible by the fact that he rather enjoyed his reputation as a liar, for wise ones said: "He's jist lettin' on."

On one of his semi-annual visits to Antrim, Hughie got into a barrel of trouble. He was charged—rumour charged him—with having blinked a widow's cow. It was noised abroad that he had been caught in the act of "skellyin'" at her. The story gathered in volume as it went from mouth to mouth, until it crystallised as a crime in the minds of half a dozen of our toughest citizens—boys who hankered for excitement as a hungry stomach hankers for food. He was finally rounded up in a field adjoining the Mill Row meeting-house and pelted with stones. I was of the "gallery" that watched the fun. I watched until a track of blood streaked down Hughie's pock-marked face. Then I ran home and told Anna.

"Ma!" I yelled breathlessly, "they're killin' Hughie Thornton!"

Jamie threw his work down and accompanied Anna over the little garden patches to the wall that protected the field. Through the gap they went, and found poor Hughie in bad shape. He was crying and

he cried like a brass band. His head and face had been cut in several places, and his face and clothes were red.

They brought him home. A crowd followed and filled Pogue's Entry, a crowd that was about equally divided in sentiment against Hughie and against the toughs.

I borrowed a can of water from Mrs. McGrath and another from the Gainers, and Anna washed old Hughie's wounds in Jamie's tub. It was a great operation. Hughie, of course, refused to divest himself of any clothing, and as she said afterwards, it was like "dhressin' th' wounds of a haystack."

One of my older brothers came home and cleared the entry; and we sat down to our stir-about and buttermilk. An extra cup of good hot strong tea was the finishing touch to the Samaritan act. Jamie had scant sympathy with the beggar-man. He had always called him hard names in language not lawful to utter, and even in this critical exigency was not over tender. Anna saw a human need, and tried to supply it.

"Did ye blink th' cow?" Jamie asked, as we sat around the candle after supper.

"Divil a blink," said Hughie.

"What did th' raise a hue-an'-cry fur?" was the next question.

"I was fixin' m' galluses over Crawford's hedge, whin a gomeral luked over an' says, says he: 'Morra, Hughie!'

"Morra, bhoy!" says I.

"Luks like snow," says he (it was in July).

"Ay," says I, "we're goin' t' haave more weather; th' sky's in a bad airt'" (direction).

Anna arose, put her little Sunday shawl around her shoulders, tightened the strings of her cap under her chin, and went out. We gasped with astonish-

ment! What on earth could she be going out for? She never went out at night. Everybody came to her. There was something so mysterious in that sudden exit that we just looked at our guest without understanding a word he said.

• Jamie opened up another line of inquiry.

“Th’ say yer a terrible liar, Hughie.”

“I am that,” Hughie said, without the slightest hesitation. “I’m th’ champ’yun liar ov County Anthrim.”

“How did ye get th’ belt?”

“Aisy, as aisy as tellin’ the thruth.”

“That’s harder nor ye think.”

“So’s lyin’, Jamie!”

“Tell us how ye won th’ champ’yunship.”

“Whin I finish this dhraw.”

He took a live coal and stoked up the bowl of his old cutty-pipe. The smacking of his lips could have been heard at the mouth of Pogue’s Entry. We waited with breathless interest. When he had finished he knocked the ashes out on the toe of his brogue and talked for nearly an hour of the great event in which he covered himself with glory.

It was a fierce encounter, according to Hughie, the then Champion being a Ballymena man by the name of Jack Rooney. Jack and a bunch of vagabonds sat on a stone-pile near Ballyclare when Hughie hove in sight. The beggar-man was at once challenged to divest himself of half his clothes or enter the contest. He entered, with the result that Ballymena lost the championship! The concluding round, as Hughie recited it, was as follows:

“I dhruv a nail throo th’ moon wanst,” said Jack.

“Ye did, did ye,” said Hughie, “but did ye iver hear ov the maan that climbed up over the clouds wid a hammer in his hand an’ clinched it on th’ other side?”

"No," said the champion.

"I'm him!" said Hughie.

"I'm bate!" said Jack Rooney, "an' begods if I wor St. Peether I'd kape ye outside th' gate till ye tuk it out again!"

Anna returned with a blanket rolled up under her arm. She gave Hughie his choice between sleeping in Jamie's corner among the lasts or occupying the pigsty. He chose the pigsty, but before he retired I begged Anna to ask him about the Banshee.

"Did ye ever really see a Banshee, Hughie?"

"Is there aanythin' a champ'yun liar haasn't seen?" Jamie interrupted.

"Ay," Hughie said, "'deed there is, he nivir seen a maan who'd believe 'im, even whin he was tellin' the thruth!"

"That's broth for your noggin', Jamie," Anna said.

Encouraged by Anna, Hughie came back with a thrust that increased Jamie's sympathy for him.

"I'm undther yer roof an' beholdin' t' yer kindness, but I'd like t' ax ye a civil quest'yun if I may be so bowld."

"Ay, go on."

"Did ye blow a farmer's brains out in th' famine fur a pint ov milk?"

"It's a lie!" Jamie said indignantly.

"Well, me bhoy, there must b' quite a wheen thrainin' fur me belt in Anthrim!"

"There's something in that, Hughie!"

"Ay, somethin' Hughie Thornton didn't put in it!"

We youngsters were irritated and impatient over what seemed to us useless palaver about minor details. We wanted the story and wanted it at once, for we understood that Hughie went to bed with the crows, and we stood in terror lest this huge bundle

of pockets, with its unearthly voice, should vanish into thin air.

"D'y'e know McShane?" he asked.

"Ay, middlin'."

"Ax 'im what Hughie Thornton towld 'im wan night be th' hour ov midnight an' afther. Ax 'im, I say, an' he'll swear be th' Holy Virgin an' St. Peether t' it!"

"Jist tell us aanyway, Hughie," Anna urged, and the beggar-man proceeded.

"I was be th' oul' Quaker graveyard be Moylena wan night whin th' shadows fell, an' bein' more tired than most, I slipt in an' lay down be th' big wall t' slape. I cros't m'self seven times, an' says I, 'God rest th' sowls ov all here, an' God prosper th' sowl ov Hughie Thornton.' I wint t' slape, an slept th' slape ov th' just till twelve be th' clock. I was shuk out ov slape by a screech that waked th' dead!

"Och, be th' powers, Jamie, me hair stud like the brisels on O'Hara's hog. I lukt and what m' eyes lukt upon froze me blood like icicles hingin' frum th' thatch. It was a woman in a white shift, young and beautiful, wid hair stramin' down her back. She sat on th' wall wid her head in her han's keenin' an' moanin': 'Ochone, ochone!' I thried to speake, but m' tongue cluv t' th' roof ov m' mouth. I tried t' move a han' but it wudn't budge. M' legs an' feet wor as stiff and shtrait as th' legs ov them tongs in yer chimley. Och, but it's th' prackus I was from top t' toe! Dead intirely was I but fur th' eyes an' th' wit behint thim. She ariz an' walked up an' down, back an' fort', up an' down, back an' fort', keenin', an' cryin' an' wringin' her han's! Man alive, didn't she carry on terrible! Purty soon wid a yell she lept into the graveyard, thin she lept on th' wall, thin I heerd her on th' road, keenin'; an' iverywhere she wint wor long bars of light like sunbames streamin'

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throo th' holes in a barn. Th' keenin become waker an' waker till it died down like the cheep ov a willy-wag-tail far off be the ind ov th' road."

"I got up an' ran like the red shank t' McShane's house. I dundthered at his doore till he opened it, thin I towld him I'd seen th' Banshee!"

"That bates Bannagher!" says he.

"It bates th' devil," says I. "But whose fur above th' night is what I'd like t' know?"

"Oul' Misther Chaine," says he, "as sure as gun's iron!"

The narrative stopped abruptly, stopped at McShane's door.

"Did oul' Misther Chaine die that night?" Anna asked.

"Ax McShane!" was all the answer he gave, and we were sent off to bed.

Hughie was escorted to the pigsty with his blanket and candle. What Jamie saw on the way to the pigsty made the perspiration stand in big beads on his furrowed brow. Silhouetted against the sky were several figures. Some were within a dozen yards, others were farther away. Two sat on a low wall that divided the Adair and Mulholland gardens. They were silent and motionless, but there was no mistake about it. He directed Anna's attention to them and she made light of it. When they returned to the house Jamie expressed fear for the life of the beggar-man. Anna whispered something into his ear, for she knew that we were wide awake. They went into their room conversing in an undertone.

The thing was so uncanny to me that it was three o'clock next morning before I went to sleep. As early as six there was an unusual shuffling and clattering of feet over the cobblestones in Pogue's Entry. We knew everybody in the entry by the sound of their footfall. The clatter was by the feet of strangers.

I "dunched" my brother, who lay beside me, with my elbow.

"Go an' see if oul' Hughie's livin' or dead," I said.

"Ye cudn't kill 'im," he said.

"How d'ye know?"

"I heerd a quare story about 'im last night!"

"Where?"

"In th' barber's shop."

"Is he a feerie?"

"No."

"What is he?"

"Close yer trap an' lie still!"

Somebody opened the door and walked in. I slid into my clothes and climbed down. It was Withero. He shook Anna and Jamie in their bed, and asked in a loud voice: "What's all this palaver about an oul' trollop what niver earned salt t' is pirtas?"

"Go on t' yer stone-pile, Willie," Anna said, as she sat up in bed; "what ye don't know will save docther's bills."

"If I catch m'self thinkin' aanythin' sauncy ov that aul' haythen baste I'll change m' name!" he said, as he turned and left in high dudgeon.

When I got to the pigsty there were several early callers lounging around. "Jowler" Hajney sat on a big stone near the slit. Mary McConaughy stood with her arms akimbo, within a yard of the door, and Tommy Wilson was peeping into the sty through a knot-hole on the side. I took my turn at the hole. Hughie had evidently been awakened early. He was sitting arranging his pockets. Con Mulholland came down the entry with his gun over his shoulder. He had just returned from his vigil as night watchman at the Greens, and was going the longest way around to his home.

He leaned his gun against the house side and lit

his pipe. Then he opened the sty door, softly, and said: "Morra, Hughie."

"Morra, Con," came the answer, in calliope tones from our guest.

"Haave ye a good stock ov tubacco?" Con asked Hughie.

"I cud shtart a pipe shap, Con, fur be th' first trake ov dawn I found five new pipes an' five half ounces ov tubacca inside th' door ov th' sty!"

"Take this bit too. Avic, ye don't come often," and he gave him a small package and took his departure.

Eliza Conlon brought a cup of tea. Without even looking in, she pushed the little door ajar, laid it just inside, and went away without a word. Mulholland and Hainey seemed supremely concerned about the weather. From all they said it was quite evident that each of them had "jist dhrapped aroun' t' find out what Jamie thought ov th' prospects fur a fine day!" Old Sandy Somerville came hatless and in his shirt-sleeves, his hands deep in his pockets and his big watch-chain dangling across what Anna called the "front of his back." Sandy was some quality, too, and owned three houses.

"Did aany o' ye see my big orange cat?" he asked the callers.

Without waiting for an answer he opened the door of the pigsty and peeped in.

By the time Hughie scrambled out there were a dozen men, women, and boys around the sty. As the beggar-man struggled up through his freight to his feet, the eyes of the crowd were scrutinising him. Sandy shook hands with him and wished him a pleasant journey.

Hainey hoped he would live long and prosper. As he expressed the hope, he furtively stuffed into one of Hughie's pockets a small package.

Anna came out and led Hughie into the house for breakfast. The little crowd moved toward the door. On the doorstep she turned around and said: "Hughie's goin' t' haave a cup an' a slice, an' go. Ye can all see him in a few minutes. Excuse me if I shut the doore, but Jamie's givin' the thrush its mornin' bath, an' it might fly ou&."

She gently closed the door, and we were again alone with the guest.

"The luck ov God is m' portion here," he said, looking at Anna.

Nothing was more evident. His pockets were taxed to their full capacity, and those who gathered around the table that morning wished that the "luck of God" would spread a little.

"Th' feeries must haave been t' see ye," Jamie said, eyeing his pockets.

"Ay, gey sauncy feeries, too!"

"Did ye see aany, Hughie?" Anna asked.

"No, but I had a wondtherful dhrame."

The announcement was a disappointment to us. We had dreams of our own and to have right at our fireside the one man in all the world who *saw* things and get merely a dream from him was, to say the least, discouraging.

"I thocht I heer'd th' rat, tap; rat, tap, of th' Lepracaun—th' feerie shoemaker.

"'Is that th' Lepracaun?' says I. 'If it is I want m' three wishcs.'

"'Git him out,' says he, 'fur I'm gey busy th' night.'

"'Sound slape th' night an' safe journey th' morra,' says I.

"'Get your third out or I'm gone,' says he.

"'I scratched m' head an' swithered, but devil a third cud I think ov. Jist as he was goin', 'Oh,' says I, 'I want a pig fur this sty!'

" 'Ye'll git him!' sayd he, an' off he wint."

Here was something, after all, that gave us more excitement than a Banshee story. We had a sty. We had hoped for years for a pig. We had been forced often to use some of the sty for fuel, but in good time Jamie had always replaced the boards. This was a real vision, and we were satisfied. Jamie's faith in Hughie soared high at the time, but a few months later it fell to zero. Anna, with a twinkle in her eye, would remind us of Hughie's prophecy. One day he wiped the vision off the slate.

" T' h——l wi' Hughie!" he said. " Some night he'll come back an' slape there, thin we'll have a pig in th' sty shure!"

As he left our house that morning he was greeted in a most unusual manner by a score of people who crowded the entry. Men and women gathered around him. They inspected the wounds. They gave their blessings in as many varieties as there were people present. The new attitude towards the beggar baffled us. Generally he was considered a good deal of a nuisance and something of a fraud, but that morning he was looked upon as a saint—as one inspired, as one capable of bestowing benedictions on the young and giving "luck" to the old. Out of their penury and want they brought gifts of food, tobacco, cloth for patches, and needles and thread. He was overwhelmed and overburdened, and as his mission of gathering food for a few weeks was accomplished, he made for the town head when he left the entry.

The small crowd grew into a big one, and he was the centre of a throng as he made his way north. When he reached the town well, Maggie McKinstry had several small children in waiting, and Hughie was asked to give them a blessing. It was a new atmosphere to him, but he bungled through it. The more unintelligible his jabbering, the more assured

were the recipients of his power to bless. One of the boys who stoned him was brought by his father to ask forgiveness.

"God save ye kindly," Hughie said to him. "Th' woonds ye made haave been turned into blessin's galore!"

He came in despised. He went out a saint.

It proved to be Hughie's last visit to Antrim. His going out of life was a mystery, and as the years went by tradition accorded him an exit not unlike that of Moses. I was amongst those the current of whose lives were supposed to have been changed by the touch of his hand on that last visit. Anna alone knew the secret of his alleged sainthood. She was the author and publisher of it. That night when she left us with Hughie she gathered together in 'Liza Conlon's a few "hand-picked" people whose minds were as an open book to her. She told them that the beggar-man was of an ancient line, wandering the earth in search of the Holy Grail, but that as he wandered he was recording in a secret book the deeds of the poor. She knew exactly how the news would travel and where. One superstition stoned him and another canonised him.

"Dear," she said to me, many, many years afterwards. "A good thought will travel as fast an' as far as a bad wan if it gets th' right start!"

## CHAPTER VII

### IN THE GLOW OF A PEAT FIRE

"**I**T'S a quare world," Jamie said one night, as we sat in the glow of a peat fire.

"Ay, 'deed yer right, Jamie," Anna replied, as she gazed into the smokeless flames.

He took his short, black pipe out of his mouth, spat into the burning sods, and added: "I wondther if it's as quare t' everybody, Anna."

"Ochance," she replied, "it's quare t' poor craithers who haave naither mate, money, nor marbles, nor chalk t' make th' ring."

There had been but one job that day—a pair of McGuckin's boots. They had been half-soled and heeled, and my sister had taken them home, with orders what to bring home for supper.

The last handful of peat had been put on the fire. The cobbler's bench had been put aside for the night and we gathered closely around the hearth.

The town clock struck eight.

"What th' h——l's kapin' th' hussy!" Jamie said petulantly.

"Hugh's at a Fenian meeting more'n likely, an' it's worth a black eye for th' wife t' handle money when he's gone," Anna suggested.

"More likely he's sleepin' off a dhrunk," he said.

"No, Jamie, he laves that t' craithers who give 'im a livin'."

"Yer no judge o' human naiture, Anna. A squint out o' th' tail o' yer eye at what McGuckin carries in front ov 'im wud tell ye betther if ye had th' wits to obsarve."

Over the fire hung a pot on the chain, and close to the turf coals sat the kettle, singing. Nothing of that far-off life has left a more lasting impression than the singing of the kettle. It sang a dirge that night, but it usually sang of hope. It was ever the harbinger of the thing that was most indispensable in that home of want—a cup of tea. Often it was tea without milk, sometimes without sugar, but always tea. If it came to a choice between tea and bread, we went without bread.

Anna did not relish the reflection on her judgment, and remained silent.

There was a loud noise at the door.

“Jazus!” Jamie exclaimed, “it’s snowin’”

Some one was kicking the snow off against the door-post. The latch was listed, and in walked Felix Boyle, the bogman.

“What th’ blazes are ye in th’ dark fur?” Felix asked in a deep, hoarse voice. His old rabbit-skin cap was pulled down over his ears, his head and shoulders were covered with snow. As he shook it off we shivered. We were in debt to Felix for a load of turf, and we suspected he had called for the money. Anna lit the candle she was saving for supper-time. The bogman threw his cap and overcoat over in the corner on the lasts, and sat down. “I’m frozen t’ death!” he said, as he proceeded to take off his brogues.

As he came up close to the coals, we were smitten with his foul breath, and in consequence gave him a wider berth. He had been drinking.

“Where’s the mare?” Anna asked.

“Gone home, th’ bitch o’ h——l,” he said, “an’ she’s got m’ load o’ turf wid ‘er, bad cess t’ ‘er dhrity sowl!”

The town clock struck nine.

Felix removed his socks, pushed his stool aside,

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and sat down on the mud floor. A few minutes later he was flat on his back, fast asleep and snoring loudly.

The fire grew smaller. Anna husbanded the diminishing embers by keeping them closely together with the long tongs. The wind howled and screamed. The window rattled, the door creaked on its hinges, and every few minutes a gust of wind came down the chimney and blew the ashes into our faces. We huddled nearer the fire.

"Can't ye fix up that oul' craither's head a bit?" Jamie asked.

I brought over the bogman's coat. Anna made a pillow of it and placed it under his head. He turned over on his side. As he did so a handful of small change rolled out of his pocket.

"Think of that now," Jamie said, as he gathered it up and stuffed it back where it belonged, "an oul dhrunken turf dhriver wi' money t' waste while we're starvin'."

From that moment we were acutely hungry.

This new incident rendered the condition poignant.

"Maybe Mrs. Boyle an' th' wains are as hungry as we are," Anna remarked.

"Wi' a bogful o' turf at th' doore?"

"Th' can't eat turf, Jamie!"

"Th' can warm their shins, that's more'n we can do, in a minute or two."

The rapidly diminishing coals were arranged once more. They were a mere handful now, and the house was cold.

There were two big holes in the chimney where Jamie kept old pipes, pipe cleaners, bits of rags, and scraps of tobacco. He liked to hide a scrap or two there, and in times of scarcity make himself believe he *found* them. His last puff of smoke had gone up the chimney hours ago. He searched both holes

without success. A bright idea struck him. He searched for Boyle's pipe. He searched in vain.

"Holy Moses!" he exclaimed, "what a breath; a pint ov that wud make a mule dhrunk!"

"Thry it, Jamie," Anna said, laughing.

"Thry it yerself—yer a good dale more ov a judge," he said snappishly.

A wild gust of wind came down the chimney and blew the loose ashes off the hearth. Jamie ensconced himself in his corner—a picture of despair.

"I wondther if Billy O'Hare's in bed?" he said.

"Ye'd need sumigatin' afther smokin' Billy's tobacco, Jamie!"

"I'd smoke tobacco scraped out o' the breeches pocket ov th' oul' devil in hell!" he replied.

He arose, put on his mussler, and made ready to visit the sweep. On the way to the door another idea turned him back. He put on the bogman's overcoat and rabbit-skin cap. Anna, divining his intention, said: "That's th' first sign of sense I've seen in you for a month of Sundays."

"Ye cudn't see it in a month ov Easter Sundays, anyway," he retorted, with a superior toss of his head.

Anna kept up a rapid fire of witty remarks. She injected humour into the situation and laughed like a girl, and although she felt the pangs more keenly than any of us, her laughter was genuine and natural.

Jamie had his empty pipe in his mouth, and by force of habit he picked up in the tongs a little bit of live coal to light it. We all tittered.

"Th' h——l!" he muttered, as he made for the door. Before he reached it my sister walked in. McGuckin wasn't at home. His wife couldn't pay. We saw the whole story on her face, every pang of it. Her eyes were red and swollen. Before she got out a sentence of the tale of woe, she noticed the old man in Boyle's clothing and burst out laughing. So

hearty and boisterous was it that we all again caught the contagion and laughed with her. Sorrow was deep-seated. It had its roots away down at the bottom of things, but laughter was always up near the surface and could be tapped on the slightest provocation. It was a by-valve—a way of escape for the overflow. There were times when sorrow was too deep for tears. But there never was a time when we couldn't laugh!

People in our town who expected visitors to knock, provided a knocker. The knocker was a distinct line of social demarcation. We lived below the line. The minister and the tract distributor were the only persons who ever knocked at our door.

Scarcely had our laughter died away when the door opened and there entered in the sweep of a blizzard's tail Billy O'Hare. The gust of cold winter wind made us shiver again, and we drew up closer to the dying fire—so small now as to be seen with difficulty.

"Be th' seven crosses ov Arbow, Jamie," he said "I'm glad yer awake, me bhoy; if ye hadn't I'd haave pulled ye out be th' tail ov yer shirt!"

"I was jist within an ace ov goin' over an' pullin' ye out be th' heels myself."

The chimney-sweep stepped forward and, tapping Jamie on the forehead, said: "Two great minds workin' on th' same thought shud produce wondtherful results, Jamie; lend me a chew ov tobacco!"

"Ye've had larks for supper, Billy; yer jokin'!" Jamie said.

"Larks be d——d." Billy said, "m' tongue's stickin' t' th' roof ov me mouth!"

Again we laughed, while the two men stood looking at each other—speechless.

"Ye can do switherin' as easy sittin' as standin'," Anna said, and Billy sat down.

The bogman's story was repeated in minutest

detail. The sweep scratched his sooty head and looked wise.

"It's gone!" Anna said quietly, and we all looked toward the fire. It was dead. The last spark had been extinguished. We shivered.

"We don't need so many stools aanyway," Jamie said. "I'll get a hatchet an' we'll haave a fire in no time."

"T' be freezin' t' death wi' a bogman goin' t' waste is unChristian, t' say th' laste," Billy ventured.

"Every time we get to th' end of th' tether God appears!" Anna said reassuredly, as she pinned her shawl closer around her neck.

"There's nothin' but empty bowels and empty pipes in our house," the sweep said, "but we've got half a dozen good turf left!"

"Well, it's a long lane that's got no turnin'—ye might lend us thim," Jamie suggested.

"If ye'll excuse m' fur a minit, I'll warm this house, an' may the Virgin choke m' in th' nixt chimley I sweep if I don't!"

In a few minutes he returned with six black turf. The fire was rebuilt, and we basked in its warm white glow. The bogman snored on. Billy inquired about the amount of his change. Then he became solicitous about his comfort on the floor. Each suggestion was a furtive flank movement on Boyle's loose change.

Anna saw the bēnt of his mind and tried to divert his attention.

"Did ye ever hear, Billy," she said, "that if we stand a dhrunk maan on his head it sobers him?"

"Be the powers, no."

"They say," she said, with a twinkle in her eyes, ".that it empties him of his contents."

"Ay," sighed the sweep; "there's something in that, Anna; let's thry it on Boyle."

There was an element of excitement in the sug-

gestion and we youngsters hoped it would be carried out. Billy made a move to suit the action to the thought, but Anna pushed him gently back.

"Jamie's mouth is as wathry as yours, Billy, but we'll take no short cuts, we'll go th' long way around."

That seemed a death-blow to hope. My sisters began to whimper and sniffle. We had many devices for diverting hunger. The one always used as a last resort was the stories of the "great famine." We were particularly helped by one about a family half of whom died around a pot of stir-about that had come too late. When we heard Jamie say, "Things are purty bad, but they're not as bad as they might be," we knew a famine story was on the way.

"Hould yer horses there a minute!" Billy O'Hare broke in. He took the step-ladder and before we knew what he was about he had taken a bunch of dried rosemary from the roof-beams and was rubbing it in his hands as a substitute for tobacco.

After rubbing it between his hands, he filled his pipe and began to puff vigorously.

"Wud ye luk at 'im!" Jamie exclaimed.

"I've lived with th' mother ov invintion since I was. th' size ov a mushroom," he said between the puffs, "an' begorra she's betther nor a wife."

The odour filled the house. It was like the sweet incense of a censer. The men laughed and joked over the discovery. The sweep indulged himself in some extravagant self-laudatory statements, one of which became a household word with us.

"Jamie," he said, as he removed his pipe and looked seriously at my father, "who was that poltroon that discovered tobacco?"

Anna informed him.

"What'll become ov 'im whin compared wid

O'Hare, th' inventor of th' rosemary delection? I ax ye, Jamie, bekase ye're an honest maan."

"Heaven knows, Billy."

"Ay, Heaven only knows, fur I'll hand down t' m' future ancestors the O'Hare brand ov rosemary tobacco!"

"Wondtherful, wondtherful!" Jamie said, in mock solemnity.

"Ay, t' think," Anna said, "that ye invinted it in our house!"

We forgot our hunger pangs in the excitement. Jamie filled his pipe, and the two men smoked for a few minutes. Then a fly appeared in the precious ointment. My father took his pipe out of his mouth and looked inquisitively at Billy.

"M' head's spinnin' 'round like a peerie!" he exclaimed.

"Whin did ye ate anything?" asked the sweep.

"Yesterday."

"Ay, well, it's th' mate ye haaven't in yer bowels that's makin' ye feel quare."

"What's th' matther wi' th' invintor?" Anna asked.

Billy had removed his pipe and was staring vacantly into space.

"I'm seein' things two at a time, b' Jazus!" he answered.

"We've got plenty of nothin' but wather, maybe ye'd like a good dhrink, Billy?"

Before he could reply the bogman raised himself to a half-sitting posture, and yelled with all the power of his lungs: "Whoa! back, ye dhrity baste, back!"

The wild yell chilled the blood in our veins.

He sat up, looked at the black figure of the sweep for a moment, then made a spring at Billy, and before any one could interfere poor Billy had been felled to the floor with a terrible smash on the jaw.

Then he jumped on him. We youngsters raised a howl that awoke the sleepers in Pogue's Entry. Jamie and Billy soon overpowered Boyle. When the neighbours arrived they found O'Hare sitting on Boyle's neck and Jamie on his legs.

"Where am I?" Boyle asked.

"In the home of friends," Anna answered.

"Wud th' frien's donate a mouthful ov breath?"

He was let up. The story of the night was told to him. He listened attentively. When the story was told he thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth some change.

"Hould yer han' out, ye black imp o' hell," he said to O'Hare.

The sweep obeyed, but remarked that the town clock had already struck twelve.

"I don't care a d——n if it's thirteen!" he said.  
"That's fur bread, that's fur tay, that's fur tobacco,  
an 'that's fur somethin' that runs down yer throat  
like a rasp, *fur me*. Now don't let th' grass grow  
undther yer flat feet, ye devil."

After some minor instructions from Anna, the sweep went off on his midnight errand. The neighbours were sent home. The kettle replaced the pot on the chain, and we gathered full of ecstasy close to the fire.

"Whisht!" Anna said.

We listened. Above the roar of the wind and the rattling of the casement we heard a loud noise.

"It's Billy dundtherin' at Marget Hurl's doore," Jamie said.

O'Hare arrived with a bang! He put his bundles down on the table and vigorously swung his arms like fails around him to thaw himself out. Anna arranged the table and prepared the meal. Billy and Jamie went at the tobacco. Boyle took the whisky and said: "I thank my God an' the holy angels that

I'm in th' house ov timperance payple!" Then looking at Jamie, he said: "Here's t' ye, Jamie, an' ye, Anna, an' th' scoundthrel O'Hare, an' here's t' th' three that niver bred, th' priest, th' pope, an' th' mule!"

Then at a draught he emptied the bottle and threw it behind the fire, grunting his satisfaction.

"Wudn't that make a corpse turn 'round in his coffin?" Billy said.

"Keep yer eye on that loaf, Billy, or he'll be dhrinkin' our health in it!" Jamie remarked humorously.

Boyle stretched himself out on the floor and yawned. The little table was brought near the fire, the loaf was cut in slices and divided. It was a scene that brought us to the edge of tears—tears of joy. Anna's face particularly beamed. She talked as she prepared, and her talk was of God's appearance at the end of every tether, and of the silver lining on the edge of every cloud. She had a penchant for mottoes, but she never used them in a siege. It was when the siege was broken she poured them in and they found a welcome. As she spoke of God bringing relief, Boyle got up on his haunches.

"Anna," he said, "if aanybody brot me here th' night it was th' oul' divil in hell."

"'Deed yer mistaken, Felix," she answered sweetly. "When God sends a maan aanywhere he always gets there, even if he has to be taken there by th' divil."

When all was ready we gathered around the table.

"How I wish we could sing!" she said, as she looked at us.

The answer was on every face. Hunger would not wait on ceremony. We were awed into stillness and silence, however, when she raised her hand in benediction. We bowed our heads. Boyle crossed himself.

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“Father,” she said, “we thank Thee for sendin’ our friend Felix here th’ night. Bless his wife an’ wains, bless them in basket an’ store, an’ take good care of his oul’ mare. Amen!”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WIND BLOWETH WHERE IT LISTETH

I SAT on a fence in a potato field, whittling an alder stick into a pea-blower one afternoon in the early autumn, when I noticed at the other end of the field the well-known figure of "the master." He was dressed as usual in light gray, and as usual rode a fine horse. I dropped off the fence as if I had been shot. He urged the horse to a gallop. I pushed the clumps of red hair under my cap and pressed it down tightly on my head. Then I adjusted the string that served as a suspender. On came the galloping horse. A few more lightning touches to what covered my nakedness and he reined up in front of me! I straightened up like a piece of whale-bone!

"What are ye doing?" he asked in that far-off imperious voice of his.

"Kapin' th' crows off th' pirtas, yer honour."

"You need a new shirt!" he said.

The blood rushed to my face. I tried to answer, but the attempt seemed to choke me.

"You need a new shirt!" he almost yelled at me.

I saw a smile playing about the corners of his fine large eyes. It gave me courage.

"Ay, yer honour, 'deed that's thtrue."

"Why don't you get one?"

The answer left my mind and travelled like a flash to the glottis, but that part of the machinery was out of order, and the answer hung fire. I paused, drew a long breath that strained the string. Then matching his thin smile with a thick grin, I replied:

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"Did yer honour iver work fur four shillin's a week and share it wid nine others?"

"No!" he said, and the imprisoned smile was released.

"Well, if ye iver do, shure ye'll be lucky to haave skin, let alone shirt!"

"You consider yourself lucky, then?"

"Ay, middlin'."

He galloped away and I lay down flat on my back, wiped the sweat from my brow with the sleeve of my jacket, turned the hair loose, and eased up the string.

That night, at the first sound of the farmyard bell, I took to my heels through the fields, through the yard, and down the Belfast road to Withero's stone-pile. Willie was just quitting for the day. I was almost breathless, but I blurted out what then seemed to me the most important happening in my life.

Willie took his eye-protectors off and looked at me.

"So ye had a crack wi' the masther, did ye?"

"Ay, quite a crack."

"He mistuk ye fur a horse!" he said.

This damper on my enthusiasm drew an instant reply.

"Deed no, nor an ass naither."

Willie bundled up his hammers and prepared to go home. He took out his flint and steel. Over the flint he laid a piece of brown paper, chemically treated, then he struck the flint a sharp blow with his steel; a spark was produced, the spark ignited the paper, it began to burn in a smouldering blazeless way; he stuffed the paper into the bowl of his pipe, and began the smoke that was to carry him over 'e journey home. I shouldered some of his hammers and we trudged along the road toward Antrim.

"Throth, I know yer no ass, me bhoy, though

Jamie's a good dale of a mule, but yer Ma's got wit  
though fur the family. That answer ye gave Misther  
Chaine was from yer Ma. It was gey cute an'll git  
ye a job, I'll bate."

I had something else to tell him, but I dreaded  
his critical mind. When we got to the railway bridge  
he laid his hammers on the wall while he relit his  
pipe. I saw my last opportunity and seized it.

"Say, Willie, did ye iver haave a feelin' that made  
ye feel fine all over, and—and—made ye pray?"

"I niver pray," he said. "These wathery-inouthed  
gosoons who pray air jist like oul' Hughie Thornton  
wi' his pockets bulgin' wi' scroof (crusts). They're  
naggin' at God from Aysther t' Christmas t' fill their  
pockets! A good day's stone-breakin' 's my prayer;  
At night I jist say, 'Thank ye, Father!' In th'  
inornin' I say, 'Morra, Father, how's all up aroun'  
th' throne this mornin'?"

"An' does He spake t' ye back?"

"Ov coarse, d'y'e think He's got worse manners  
nor me? He says, 'Hallo, Willie,' says He. 'How's  
it wi' ye this fine mornin'?' 'Perty fine, Father,  
perty fine,' says I. But tell me, bhoy, was there a  
girl aroun' whin that feelin' struck ye?"

"Devil a girl, at all!"

"Them feelin's sometimes comes from a girl, ye  
know. I had wan wanst, but that's a long story,  
heigh ho; ay, that's a long story!"

"Did she die, Willie?"

"Never mind her. That feelin' may haave been  
from God. Yer Ma hes a quare notion that wan  
chile of her'n will be inclined that way. She's dhrawn  
eleven blanks, maybe she's dhrawn a prize, afther  
all; who knows."

Old McCabe, the road mender, overtook us, and  
for the rest of the journey I was seen but not heard.

That night I sat by her side in the chimney-corner

and recited the events of the day. It had been full of magic, mystery, and meaning to me. The meaning was a little clearer to me after the recital.

"Withero sometimes talks like a ha'penny book wi' no laves in it," she said. "But most of the time he's nearer the facts than most of us. It isn't all blether, dear."

We sat up late, long after the others had gone to sleep. She read softly a chapter of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the chapter in which he is relieved of his burden. I see now that woodcut of a gate and over the gate the words: "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." She had read it before. I was familiar with it, but in the light of that day's experience it had a new meaning. She warned me, however, that my name was neither Pilgrim nor Withero, and in elucidating her meaning she explained the phrase, "The wind bloweth where it listeth." I learned to listen for the sound thereof, and I wondered from whence it came, not only the wind of the heavens, but the spirit that moved men in so many directions.

The last act of that memorable night was the making of a picture. It took many years to find out its meaning, but every stroke of the brush is as plain to me now as they were then.

"Ye'll do somethin' for me?"

"Ay, aanything in th' world."

"Ye won't glunch nor ask questions?"

"Not a question."

"Shut yer eyes an' stan' close t' th' table."

I obeyed. She put into each hand a smooth stick with which Jamie had smoothed the soles of our shoes.

"Jist for th' now these are the handles of a plough. Keep yer eyes shut tight. Ye've seen a maan ploughin' a field?"

"Ay."

"Think that ye see a long, long field. Ye're ploughin' it. The other end is so far away ye can't see it. Ye see a wee bit of the furrow, jist a wee bit. Squeeze th' plough handles."

I squeezed.

"D'ye see th' trees yonder?"

"Ay."

"An' th' birds pickin' in th' furrow?"

"A-y."

She took the sticks away and gently pushed me on a stool and told me I might open my eyes.

"That's quare," I said.

"Listen, dear, ye've put yer han' t' th' plough; ye must niver, niver take it away. All through life ye'll haave them plough handles in yer han's, an' ye'll be goin' down th' furrow. Ye'll crack a stone here and there, th' plough'll stick often an' things'll be out of gear, but yer in th' furrow all the time. Ye'll change horses, ye'll change clothes, ye'll change yerself, but ye'll always be in the furrow, ploughin', ploughin', ploughin'! I'll go a bit of th' way, Jamie'll go a bit, yer brothers an' sisters a bit, but we'll dhrap out wan b' wan. Ye're God's ploughmaan."

As I stood to say good-night she put her hand on my head and muttered something that was not intended for me to hear. Then she kissed me good-night, and I climbed to my pallet under the thatch.

I was afraid to sleep, lest the "feelin'" should take wings. When I was convinced that some of it, at least, would remain, I tried to sleep and couldn't. The mingled ecstasy and excitement was too intense. I heard the town clock strike the hours far into the morning.

Before she awoke next morning I had exhausted every agency in the house that would co-ordinate flesh and spirit. When I was ready I tiptoed to her bedside and touched her on the cheek. Instantly

she awoke and sat upright. I put my hands on my hips and danced before her. It was a noiseless dance, with bare feet on the mud floor.

Her long thin arms shot out toward me, and I buried myself in them.

"So it stayed," she whispered in my ear.

"Ay, an' there's more of it."

She arose and dressed quickly. A live coal was scraped out of the ashes and a turf fire built around it. My feet were winged as I flew to the town well for water. When I returned she had several slices of toast ready. Toast was a luxury. Of course, there was always—or nearly always—bread, and often there was butter, but toast to the very poor in those days wasn't merely a matter of bread and butter, fire and time! It was more often inclination that turned the balance for or against it, and inclination always came on the back of some emotion, chance, or circumstance. Here all the elements met and the result was toast.

I took a mouthful of her tea out of her cup; she reciprocated. We were like children. Maybe we were. Love tipped our tongues, winged our feet, opened our hearts and hands, and permeated every thought and act. She stood at the mouth of the entry until I disappeared at the town head. While I was yet within sight I looked back half a dozen times, and we waved our hands.

It was nearly a year before a dark line entered this spiritual spectrum. It was inevitable that such a mental condition—ever in search of a larger expression—should gravitate towards the Church. It has seemed also that it was just as inevitable that the best thought of which the Church has been the custodian should be crystallised into a creed. I was promoted to the "big house." There, of course, I was overhauled and put in touch with the fittings

and furniture. As a flunkey I had my first dose of boiled linen, and I liked it.

I was enabled now to attend church and Sunday School. Indeed, I would have gone there, religion or no religion, for where else could I have sported a white shirt and collar? With my boiled linen and my brain stuffed with texts, I gradually drew away from the chimney-corner and never again did I help Willie Withero to carry his hammers. Ah, if one could only go over life and correct the mistakes.

Gradually I lost the warm humar feeling and substituted for it a theology. I began to look upon my mother as one about whose salvation there was some doubt. I urged her to attend church. Forms and ceremonies became the all-important things, and the life and the spirit were proportionately unimportant. I became mildewed with the blight of respectability. I became the possessor of a hard hat that I might ape the respectables. I walked home every night from Ballycraigie with Jamie Wallace, and Jamie was the best-dressed working-man in the town. I was treading a well-worn pathway. I was "getting on." A good slice of my new religion consisted in excellency of service to my employers—my "bettered." Preacher, priest, and peasant thought alike on these topics. Anna was pleased to see me in a new garb, but she noticed, and I noticed, that I had grown away from the corner. In the light of my new adjustment I saw *duties* plainer, but duty may become a hammer by which affection may be beaten to death.

I imagined the plough was going nicely in the furrow, for I wasn't conscious of striking any snags or stones, but Anna said: "A ploughman who skims th' surface of th' sod strikes no stones, dear, but it's because he isn't ploughin' *deep!*"

I have ploughed deep enough since, but too late to go back and compare notes.

She was pained, but tried to hide it. If she was on the point of tears she would tell a funny story.

"Acushla," she said to me one night, after a theological discussion, "sure ye remind me of a ducklin' hatched by a hen."

"Why?"

"We're at home in conthrary elements. Ye use texts t' fight with, an' I use them to get pace of heart!"

"Are you wiser nor Mr. Holmes, an' William Brennan and Miss McGee?" I asked. "Them's th' ones that think as I do—I mane I think as they do!"

"No, 'deed I'm not as wise as aany of them, but standin' outside a wee bit I can see things that can't be seen inside. Forby they haave no special pathway t' God that's shut t' me, nor yer oul' father, nor Willie Withero."

Sometimes Jamie took a hand. Once, when he thought Anna was going to cry, in an argument, he wheeled around in his seat and delivered himself.

"I'll tell ye, Anna, that whelp needs a good argyment wi' th' tongs! Jist take them an' hit 'im a skite on the jaw wi' them an' I'll say, 'Amen.'"

"That's no clinch to an argyment," I said, "an' thruth is thruth!"

"Ay, an' tongs is tongs! An' some o' ye young upstarts whin ye git a dickey on an' a choke-me-tight collar think yer jist ready t' sit down t' tay wi' God!"

Anna explained, and gave me more credit than was due me. So Jamie ended the colloquy by the usual cap to his every climax.

"Well, what th' —— do I know about them things, aanyway? Let's haave a good cup o' tay, an' say no more about it!"

The more texts I knew, the more fanatical I

became. And the more of a fanatic I was, the wider grew the chasm that divided me from my mother. I talked as if I knew "every saint in heaven and every devil in hell."

She was more than patient with me, though my spiritual conceit must have given her many a pang. Antrim was just beginning to get accustomed to my new habiliments of boots, boiled linen, and hat, when I left to "push my fortune" in other parts. My enthusiasm had its good qualities too, and she was quick to recognise them, quicker than to notice its blemishes. My last hours in the town—on the eve of my first departure—I spent with her.

"I feel about you, dear," she said, laughing, "as Micky Free did about the soul of his father in Purgatory. He had been payin' for masses for what seemed to him an uncommonly long time.

"How's th' oul' bhoy gettin' on?" Micky asked the priest.

◆ "Perty well, Micky, his head is out."

"Begorra, thin, I know th' rist ov 'im will 'be out soon—I'll pay for no more masses!"

"Your head is up and out from the bottom th' world, and I haave faith that ye'll perty soon be all out, an' some day ye'll get the larger view, for ye'll be in a larger place an' ye'll haave seen more of people an' more of the world."

I have two letters of that period. One I wrote her from Jerusalem in the year 1884. As I read the yellow, childish epistle I am stung with remorse that it is full of the narrow sectarianism that still held me in its grip. The other is dated Antrim, July, 1884, and is her answer to my sectarian appeal.

◆ "DEAR BOY," she says, "Antrim has had many soldier sons in far-off lands, but you are the first, I think, to have the privilege of visiting the Holy Land.

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Jamie and I are proud of you. All the old friends have read your letter. They can hardly believe it. Don't worry about our souls. When we come one by one in the twilight of life, each of us, Jamie and I, will have our sheaves. They will be little ones, but we are little people. I want no glory here or hereafter that Jamie cannot share. I gave God a ploughman, but your father says I must chalk half of that to his account. Hold tight the handles and plough deep. We watch the candle and every wee spark thrills our hearts, for we know it's a letter from you.

“YOUR LOVING MOTHER.”

## CHAPTER IX

### "BEYOND TH' MEADOWS AN' TH' CLOUDS"

WHEN the bill-boards announced that I was to deliver a lecture on "England in the Sudan" in the only hall in the town, Antrim turned out to satisfy its curiosity. "How doth this man know, not having learned?" the wise ones said, for when I shook the dust of its blessed streets from my brogues seven years previously, I was an illiterate.

Anna could have told them, but none of the wise knew her, for curiously enough to those who knew of her existence, but had never seen her, she was known as "Jamie's wife." Butchers and bakers and candlestick makers were there; several ministers, some quality, near quality, the inhabitants of the entries in the "Scotch quarter," and all the newsboys in town. The fact that I personally bribed the newsboys accounted for their presence. I bought them out and reserved the front seats for them. It was in the way of a class reunion with me. Billy O'Hare had gone beyond—where there are no chimneys, and Ann where she could keep clean: they were both dead. Many of the old familiar faces were absent, they, too, had gone—some to other lands, some to another world. Jamie was there. He sat between Willie Withero and Ben Baxter. He heard little of what was said, and understood less of what he heard. The vicar, Mr. Holmes, presided. There was a vote of thanks, followed by the customary seconding by public men, then "God save the Queen," and I went home to tell Anna about it.

Jamie took one arm and Withero clung to the other.

"Jamie," shouted Withero in a voice that could be heard by the crowd that followed us, "d'y'e mind th' first time I seen ye wi' Anna?"

"Ay, 'deed I do!"

"Ye didn't know it was in 'er, did ye, Jamie?"

"Yer a liar, Willie; I know'd frum th' minute I clapped eyes on 'er that she was th' finest wuman on God's futstool!"

"Ye can haave whatever benefit ov th' doubt there is, Jamie, but jist th' same any oul' throllop can be a father, but by G—— it takes a rale wuman t' be th' mother ov a rale maan! Put that in yer pipe an' smoke it."

"He seems t' think," said Jamie, appealing to me, "that only quality can projuce fine childther!"

"Yer spakin' ov clothes, Jamie; I'm spakin' ov mind, an' ye wor behind th' doore whin th' wor givin' it out, but begorra, Anna was at th' head ov th' class, an' that's no feerie story, naither is it, me bhoy!"

At the head of Pogue's Entry, Bob Dougherty, Tommy Wilson, Sam Manderson, Lucinda Gordon, and a dozen others stopped for a "partin' crack."

The kettle was boiling on the chain. The hearth had been swept and a new coat of whitening applied. There was a candle burning in her sconce and the thin yellow rays lit up the glory on her face—a glory that was encased in a newly-tallied white cap. My sister sat on one side of the fireplace, and she on the other—in her corner. I did not wonder, I did not ask why they did not make a supreme effort to attend the lecture—I knew. They were more supremely interested than I was. They had never heard a member of the family or a relative speak in public, and their last chance had passed by. There they were,

in the light of a peat fire and the tallow dip,  
•supremely happy.

The neighbours came in for a word with Anna. They filled the space. The stools and creepies were all occupied.

"Sit down, Willie," my father said. "Take a nice cushioned chair an' be at home."

Withero was leaning against the table. He saw and was equal to the joke.

"Whin nature put a pill a on maan, it was intinded fur t' sit on th' groun', Jamie!" And he sat on the mud floor.

"It's th' proud wuman ye shud be th' night," Marget Hurll said, "an' Misther Armstrong it was that said it was proud th' town shud be t' turn out a boy like him!"

Withero took his pipe out of his mouth and spat in the ashes—as a preface to a few remarks.

"Ay," he grunted, "I cocked m' ears up an' dunched oul' Jamie whin Armshtong said that. Jamie couldn't hear it, so I whispered t' m'self, 'Begorra, if a wee fella turns *up* whin Anthrim turns 'im out, it's little credit t' Anthrim, I'm thinkin'!'"

Anna laughed, and Jamie, putting his hand behind his ear, asked: "What's that—what's that?"

The name and remarks of the gentleman who seconded the vote of thanks were repeated to him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed, as he slapped me on the knee. "Well, well, well, if that wudn't make a brass monkey laugh!"

"Say," he said to me, "d'ye mind th' night ye come home covered wi' clabber—"

"Whisht!" I said, as I put my mouth to his ear. "I only want to mind that he had three very beautiful daughters."

"Did ye iver spake t' aany o' them?" Jamie asked.

"Yes."

"Whin?"

"When I sold them papers."

"Ha, ha, a ha'penny connection, eh?"

"It's betther t' mind three fine things about a maan than wan mean thing, Jamie," Anna said.

"If both o' ye's on me, I'm bate," he said.

"Stop yer palaver an' let's haave a story ov th' war wi' th' naygars in Egypt," Mrs. Hurll said.

"Ay, that's right," one of the Gainer boys said.  
"Tell us what the queen give ye a medal fur!"

They wanted a story of blood, so I smeared the tale red. When I finished Anna said, "Now tell them, dear, what ye tuk th' shillin' fur!"

"You tell them, mother."

"Ye tuk it t' fight ignorance an' not naygars, didn't ye?"

"Yes, but that fight continues."

"Ay, with you, but—"

"Ah, never mind, mother, I have taken it up where you laid it down, and long after—"

That was far as I got, for Jamie exploded just then and said: "Now, get t' h——l home, ivery wan o' ye, an' give's a minute wi' 'im jist for ourselves, will ye?"

He said it with laughter in his voice and it sounded in the ears of those present as polite and pleasing as anything in the domain of their amenities.

They arose as one, all except Withero, and he couldn't, for Jamie gripped him by a leg and held him on the floor just as he sat.

In their good-night expressions, the neighbours unconsciously revealed what the lecture and the story meant to them. Summed up, it meant, "Sure it's jist wondtherful ye warn't shot!"

When we were alone, alone with Withero, Mary "wet" a pot of tea, and warmed up a few farrels

of fadge, and we commenced. Little was said, but 'feeling' ran high. It was like a midnight mass. Anna was silent, but there were tears, and as I held her in my arms and kissed them away, Jamie was saying to Withero: "Ye might take 'im fur a dandther out where ye broke whin we first met ye, Willie."

"Ay," Willie said, "I'm m' own gaffer, I will that."

I slept at Jamie Wallace's that night, and next morning took the "dandther" with Withero up the Dublin road, past "The Mount of Temptation" to the old stone-pile that was no longer a pile, but a hole in the side of the road. It was a sentimental journey that gave Willie a chance to say some things I knew he wanted to say.

"D'y'e mind the pirta sack throusers Anna made ye onct?"

"Yes, what of them?"

"Did ye iver think ye cud git used t' aanything if ye wor forced t' haave nothin' else for a while?"

"What's the point, Willie?"

"Sit down here awhile an' I'll tell ye."

We sat down on the bank of the roadside. He took out his pipe, steel, and flint, filled his pipe, and talked as he filled.

"Me an' Jamie wor pirta sack people, purty d---d rough, too, but yer Ma was a piece ov fine linen frum the day she walked down this road wi' yer Dah till this minit whin she's waitin' fur ye in the corner. Ivery Sunday I've gone in jist t' hai a crack wi' 'er an' d'ye know, bhoy, I got out o' that crack somethin' good fur th' week. She was i'hell on saying words purcisely, but me an' Jamie wor too thick, an' begorra she got used t' pirta sack words herself, but she was i' fine linen jist the same.

"Wan day she says t' me, 'Willie,' says she, 'ye see people through dirty specs.'

"How's that?" says I.

“‘I don’t know,’ says she, ‘fur I don’t wear yer specs, but I think it’s jist a poor habit ov yer mind. Aych poor craither is made up ov some good an’ much that isn’t s’ good, an’ ye see only what isn’t s’ good!’

“Thin she towld m’ somethin’ which she niver towld aanyone else, ‘cept yer Dah, ov coarse.

“‘Willie,’ says she, ‘fur twenty years I’ve seen the Son of Maan ivery day ov m’ life!’

“‘How’s that?’ says I.

“‘I’ve more’n seen ‘im. I’ve made tay fur ‘im, an’ broth on Sunday. I’ve mended ‘is oul’ duds, washed ‘is dhirty clothes, shuk ‘is han’, stroked ‘is hair, an’ said kind words to ‘im!’

“‘God Almighty!’ says I, ‘yer goin’ mad, Anna!’

“She tuk her oul’ Bible an’ read t’ me these words; I mind them well: “Whin ye do it t’ wan o’ these craithers ye do it t’ Me!”

“Well, me bhoy, I thunk an’ I thunk over thim words, an wud ye believe it, I begun t’ clane m’ specs. Wan day th’ ‘Dummy’ came along t’ m’ stone-pile. Ye mind ‘er, don’t ye?” (The Dummy was a harlot, who lived in the woods up the Dublin road in summer, and Heaven only knows where in winter.)

“Th’ Dummy,” Willie continued, “came over t’ th’ pile an’ acted purty gay, but says I, ‘Dummy, if there’s anythin’ I kin give ye I’ll give it, but ther’s nothin’ ye kin give me!’

“‘Ye break stones fur a livin’,’ says she.

“‘Ay,’ says I.

“‘What wud ye do if ye wor a lone wuman an’ cudn’t get nothin’ at all t’ do?’

“‘I dunno,’ says I.

“‘I don’t want to argufy or palaver wi’ a daacent maan,’ says she, “but I’m terrible hungry.”

“‘Luk here,’ says I, ‘I’ve got a dozen pirtas I’m goin’ t’ roast fur m’ dinner. I’ll roast them down

there be that gate, an' I'll lave ye six an' a dhrink ov buttermilk. Whin ye see m' lave th' gate ye'll know yer dinner's ready."

"God save ye," says she, "may yer meal barrel niver run empty, an' may yer bread foriver be rough-casted wi' butther!"

"I begun t' swither whin she left. Says I, 'Withero, is yer specs clane? Kin ye see th' Son ov Maan in th' Dummy?' 'Begorra, I dunno,' says I t' me'self. I scratched m' head an' swithered till I thought m' brains wud turn t' stone.

"Says I t' m'self at last, 'Ay, 'deed there must be th' spark there what Anna talks about!' Jist then I heard yer mother's voice as plain as I hear m' own now at this minute—an' what d'ye think Anna says?"

"I don't know, Willie."

"So ye haave th' Son ov Maan t' dinner th' day?"

"Ay," says I.

"An' givin' 'im yer lavins!"

"It was like a picce ov stone cuttin' the ball ov m' eye. It cut deep!

"I ran down th' road an' says I t' th' Dummy, 'I'll tie a rag on a stick an' whin ye see m' wavin', it come an' take yer dinner, an' I'll take what's left!"

"I didn't wait fur no answer, but went and did what I shud.

"That summer when she was hungry she hung an oul' rag on th' thorn hedge down be the wee plantain where she camped, and I answered be a rag on a stick that she cud share mine and take hers first. One day I towld 'er yer mother's story about th' Son ov Maan. It was th' only time I ever talked wi' 'er. That winther she died in th' poorhouse, and before she died she sint me this. He pulled out of an inside pocket a piece of paper, yellow with age, and so scuffed with handling that the scrawl was scarcely legible:—

*“Mr. Withero,  
Stone breaker,  
Dublin Road,  
Antrim.*

“I seen Him in the ward last night, and I’m content to go now. God save you kindly.—THE DUMMY.”

Withero, having unburdened, we dandered down the road, through Masserene and home.

I proposed to Anna a little trip to Lough Neagh in a jaunting car.

“No, dear, it’s no use; I want to mind it jist as Jamie and I saw it years an’ years ago. I see it here in th’ corner jist as plain as I saw it then; forby Antrim wud never get over th’ shock of seein’ me in a jaunting’ car.”

“Then I’ll tell you of a shorter journey. You have never seen the Steeple. It’s the most perfect of all the Round Towers in Ireland, and just one mile from this corner. Now don’t deny me the joy of taking you there. I’ll guide you over the strand and away back of the poorhouse, out at the station, and then it’s just a hundred yards or so!”

It took the combined efforts of Jamie, Withero, Mary, and me to persuade her, but she was finally persuaded, and dressed in a borrowed black knitted cap and her wee Sunday shawl, she set out with us.

“This is like a weddin’,” Jamie said, as he tied the ribbons under her chin.

“Oh, it’s worse, dear. It’s a circus an’ wake in wan, fur I’m about dead an’ he’s turned clown for a while.”

In five minutes everybody in Pogue’s Entry heard the news. They stood at the door waiting to have a look.

Matty McGrath came in to see if there was "aanythin'" she could do.

"Ay," Anna said, smiling, "ye can go over an' tell oul' Ann Agnew where I'm goin', so she won't worry herself t' death findin' out!"

"She won't see ye," Jamie said.

"She'd see a fly if it lit within a hundred yards of her!"

We went down the Kill Entry and over the rivulet we called "the strand." There were stepping stones in the water, and the passage was easy. As we crossed, she said: "Right here was th' first place ye ever came t' see th' sun dance on th' water on Easter Sunday mornin'."

We turned to the right and walked by the old burying-ground of the Unitarian meeting-house and past Mr. Smith's garden. Next to Smith's garden was the garden of a cooper—I think his name was Farren.

"Right here," I said, "is where I committed my first crime!"

"What was it?" she asked.

"Stealing apples!"

"Ay, what a townful of criminals we had then!"

We reached the back of the poorhouse. Johnny Gardner was the master of it, and "goin' t' Johnny Gardner's" was understood as the last march of many of the inhabitants of Antrim, beginning with "Tother Jack Welch," who was a sort of pauper *primus inter pares* of the town.

As we passed the little graveyard, we stood and looked over the fence at the little boards, all of one size and one pattern, that marked each grave.

"God in Heaven!" she exclaimed, "isn't it fearful not to get rid of poverty even in death!"

I saw a shudder pass over her face, and I turned mine away.

Ten minutes later we emerged from the fields at the railway station.

"You've never seen Mr. McKillop, the station-master, have you?" I asked.

"No."

"Let us wait here for a minute, we may see him."

"Oh, no, let's hurry on t' th' Steeple!"

So on we hurried.

It took a good deal of courage to enter when we got there, for the far-famed Round Tower of Antrim is *private property*. Around it is a stone wall enclosing the grounds of an estate. The Tower stands near the house of the owner, and it takes temerity in the poor to enter. They seldom do enter, as a matter of fact, for they are not particularly interested in archaeology.

We timidly entered and walked up to the Tower.

"So that's th' Steeple!"

"Isn't it fine?"

"Ay, it's wondtherful, but wudn't it be nice t' take our boots off an' jist walk aroun' on this soft nice grass on our bare feet?"

The lawn was closely clipped and as level as a billiard table. The trees were dressed in their best summer clothing. Away in the distance we caught glimpses of an abundance of flowers. The air was full of the perfume of honeysuckle and sweet clover. Anna drank in the scenery with almost childish delight.

"D'y'e think heaven will be as nice?" she asked.

"Maybe."

"If it is, we will take our boots off an' sit down, won't we?" And she laughed like a girl.

"If there are boots in the next world," I said, "there will be cobblers, and you wouldn't want our old man to be a cobbler to all eternity?"

"You're right," she said, "nor afther spending

seventy-five years here without bein' able to take my boots off an' walk on a nice lawn like this wud I care to spend eternity without that joy!"

"Do we miss what we've never had?"

"Ay, 'deed we do. I miss most what I've never had!"

"What, for instance?"

"Oh, I'll tell ye th' night when we're alone!"

We walked around the tower and ventured once bencath the branches of a big tree.

"If we lived here, d'ye know what I'd like t' do?"

"No."

"Jist take our boots off an' play hide and go seek —wudn't it be fun?"

I laughed loudly.

"Whisht!" she said. "They'll catch us if you make a noise!"

"You seem bent on getting your boots off," I said laughingly.

Her reply struck me dumb.

"Honey," she said, so softly and looking into my eyes, "do you realise that I have never stood on a patch of lawn in my life before?"

Hand in hand we walked toward the gate, taking an occasional, wistful glance back at the glory of the few, and thinking, both of us, of the millions of tired feet that never felt the softness of a smooth green sward.

At eight o'clock that night the door was shut *and barred*.

Jamie tacked several copies of the *Weekly Budget* over the window, and we were alone.

We talked of old times. We brought back the dead, and smiled or sighed over them. Old tales, of the winter nights of long ago, were retold with a new interest.

The town clock struck nine.

We sat in silence as we used to sit, while another sexton tolled off the days of the month after ringing the curfew.

"Many th' time ye've helter-skeltered home at th' sound of that bell!" she said.

"Yes, because the sound of the bell was always accompanied by a vision of a wet welt hanging over the edge of the tub!"

Jamie laughed and became reminiscent.

"D'ye mind what ye said wan time whin I bate ye wi' th' stirrup?"

"No, but I used to think a good deal more than I said.

"Ay, but wan time I laid ye across m' knee an' gave ye a good shtrappin', then stud ye up an' says I, 'It hurts me worse than it hurts ye, ye devil!'

"'Ay,' says you, 'but it didn't hurt ye in th' same place!'"

"I don't remember, but from time immemorial, boys have thought and said the same thing."

"D'ye mind when I bate ye?" Anna asked, with a smile.

"Yes, I remember you solemnly promised Jamie you would punish me, and when he went down to Barney's you took a long straw and lashed me fearfully with it!"

The town clock struck ten.

Mary, who had sat silent all evening, kissed us all good-night and went to bed.

I was at the point of departure for the New World. Jamie wanted to know what I was going to do. I outlined an ambition, but its outworking was a problem. It was beyond his ken. He could not take in the scope of it. Anna could, for she had it from the day she first felt the movement of life in me. It was unpretentious—nothing the world would call great.

"Och, maan, but that wud be th' proud day fur Anna if ye cud do it."

When the town clock struck eleven, Anna trembled.

"Yer cowld, Anna," he said. "I'll put on a few more turf."

"There's plenty on, dear; I'm not cold in my body."

"Acushla, m' oul' hide's like a buffalo's or I'd see that ye want 'im t' yerself. I'm off t' bed!"

We sat in silence gazing into the peat fire. Memory led me back down the road to yesterday. She was out in the future and wandering in an unknown continent with only hope to guide her. Yet we must get together, and that quickly.

"Minutes are like fine gold now," she said, "an' my tongue seems glued, but I jist must spake."

"We have plenty of time, mother."

"Plenty!" she exclaimed. "Every clang of th' town clock is a knife cuttin' th' cords—wan afther another—that bind me t' ye."

"I want to know about your hope, your outlook, your religion," I said.

"Th' biggest hope I've ever had was t' bear a chile that would love everybody as yer father loved me!"

"A sort of John-three-sixteen in miniature."

"Ay."

"The aim is high enough to begin with!"

"Not too high!"

"And your religion?"

"All in all, it's bein' kind an' lovin' kindness. *That* takes in God an' maan an' Pogue's Entry, an' th' world."

The town clock struck twelve. Each clang "a knife cutting a cord" and each heavier and sharper than the last. Each one vibrating, tingling, jarring along

every nerve, sinew, and muscle. A feeling of numbness crept over me.

"That's the end of life for me," she said slowly. There was a pause, longer and more intense than all the others. "Maybe ye'll get rich an' forget."

"Yes, I shall be rich. I shall be a millionaire—a millionaire of love, but no one shall ever take your place, dear!"

My overcoat served as a pillow. An old quilt made a pallet on the hard floor. I found myself being pressed gently down from the low creepie to the floor. I pretended to sleep. Her hot tears fell on my face. Her dear, toil-worn fingers were run gently through my hair. She was on her knees by my side. The tender mysticism of her youth came back and expressed itself in prayer. It was interspersed with tears and "Ave Maria!"

When the first streak of dawn penetrated the old window we had our last cup of tea together, and later, when I held her in a long, lingering embrace, there were no tears—we had shed them all in the silence of the last vigil. When I was ready to go, she stood with her arm on the old yellow mantel-shelf. She was rigid and pale as death, but around her eyes and her mouth there played a smile. There was a look ineffable of maternal love.

"We shall meet again, mother," I said.

"Ay, dearie, I know rightly we'll meet, but ochanee, it'll be out there beyond th' meadows an' th' clouds."

## CHAPTER X

### THE EMPTY CORNER

WHEN I walked into Pogue's Entry about fifteen years later, it seemed like walking into another world—I was a foreigner.

“How quare ye speake!” Jamie said.

And Mary added demurely: “Is it quality ye are that ye speake like it?”

“No, faith, not at all,” I said, “but it's the quality of America that makes me!”

“Think of that, now!” she exclaimed.

The neighbours came, new neighbours—a new generation, to most of whom I was a tradition. Other boys and girls had left Antrim for America, scores of them in the course of the years. There was a popular supposition that we all knew each other.

“Ye see th' Wilson bhoys ivery day, I'll bate,” Mrs. Hainey said.

“No, I have never seen any of them.”

“Saints alive, how's that?”

“Because we live three thousand miles apart.”

“Ay, well, shure that 'ud be quite a dandther!”

“It didn't take ye long t' git a fortune, did it?” another asked.

“I never acquired a fortune such as you are thinking of.”

“Anna said you wor rich?”

“Anna was right, I am rich, but I was the richest boy in Antrim when I lived here.”

They looked dumbfounded.

“How's that?” Mrs. Connor queried.

“Because Anna was my mother.”

I didn't want to discuss Anna at that time or to that gathering, so I gave the conversation a sudden turn and diplomatically led them in another direction. I explained how much easier it was for a policeman than a minister to make a "fortune," and most Irishmen in America had a special bias toward law. Jamie had grown so deaf that he could only hear when I shouted into his ear. Visitors kept on coming, until the little house was uncomfortably full.

"Wouldn't it be fine," I shouted into Jamie's ear, "if Billy O'Hare or Withero could just drop in now?"

"God save us all," he said, "th' oul' days an' oul' faces are gone foriver."

After some hours of entertainment the uninvited guests were invited to go home.

I pulled Jamie's old tub out into the centre of the floor, and, taking my coat off, said gently: "Now, good neighbours, I have travelled a long distance and need a bath, and if you don't mind I'll have one at once!"

They took it quite seriously and went home quickly. As soon as the house was cleared I shut and barred the door and Mary and I proceeded to prepare the evening meal.

I brought over the table and put it in its place near the fire. In looking over the old dresser I noticed several additions to the inventory I knew. The same old plates were there, many of them broken and arranged to appear whole. All holes, gashes, dents, and cracks were turned back or down to deceive the beholder. There were few whole pieces on the dresser.

"Great guns, Mary," I exclaimed, "here are two new plates and a new cup! Well, well, and you never said a word in any of your letters about them."

"Ye needn't get huffed if we don't tell ye all the startlin' things!" Mary said.

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "there's *her* cup!"

I took the precious thing from the shelf. The handle was gone, there was a gash at the lip and a few new cracks circling around the one I was familiar with twenty years previously.

What visions of the past came to me in front of that old dresser! How often in the long ago she had pushed that old cup gently toward me along the edge of the table—gently, to escape notice and avoid jealousy. Always at the bottom of it a teaspoonful of *her* tea and beneath the tea a bird's-eye-full of sugar. Each fairy picture of straggling tea leaves was our moving picture show of those old days. We all had tea leaves, but she had imagination. How we laughed and sighed and swithered over the fortunes spread out all over the inner surface of that cup!

"If ye stand there affrontin' our poor ou'l' delf all night we won't haave any tea at all!" Mary said.

The humour had gone from my face and speech from my tongue. I felt as one feels when he looks for the last time upon the face of his best friend. Mary laughed when I laid the old cup on a comparatively new saucer at my place. There was another laugh when I laid it out for customs inspection in the port of New York. I had a set of rather delicate after-dinner coffee cups. One bore the arms of Coventry in colours; another had the seal of St. John's College, Oxford; one was from Edinburgh and another from Paris. They looked aristocratic. I laid them out in a row, and at the end of the row sat the proletarian, forlorn and battered—Anna's old tea-cup.

"What did you pay for this?" asked the inspector as he touched it contemptuously with his official toe.

"Never mind what I paid for it," I replied, "it's valued at a million dollars!"

The officer laughed, and I think the other cups laughed also, but they were not contemptuous; they were simply jealous.

Leisurely I went over the dresser, noting the new chips and cracks, handling them, maybe fondling some of them, and putting them as I found them.

"I'll jist take a cup o' tay," Jamie said, "I'm not feelin' fine."

I had less appetite than he had, and Mary had less than either of us. So we sipped our tea for a while in silence.

"She didn't stay long afther ye left," Jamie said, without looking up. Turning to Mary, he continued, "How long was it, aanyway, Mary?"

"Jist a wee while."

"Ay, I know it wasn't long."

"Did she suffer much?" I asked.

"She didn't suffer aany at all," he said, "she jist withered like th' laves on th' threes."

"She jist hankered t' go," Mary added.

"Wan night whin Mary was asleep," Jamie continued, "she read over agin yer letter—th' wan where ye wor spakin' so much about fishin'."

"Ay," I said, "I had just been appointed missionary to a place called the Bowery, in New York, and I wrote her that I was no longer her ploughman, but her *fisher of men*."

"Och, maan, if ye cud haave heard her laugh over th' different kinds ov fishes ye wor catchin'! Iv'ry day for weeks she read it an' laughed an' cried over it.

"That night she says t' me, 'Jamie,' says she, 'I don't care s' much fur fishers ov men as I do for th' ploughman.'

"'Why?' says I.

"'Because,' says she, 'a gey good voice an' nice clothes will catch men, an' wimmen too, but it takes

brains t' plough up th' superstitions ov th' ignorant.'

"There's somethin' in that," says I.

"Tell 'im whin he comes," says she, 'that I put th' handles ov a plough in his han's, an' he's t' let go ov him only in death.'

"I'll tell 'm," says I, 'but it's yerself that'll be here whin he comes,' says I.

"She smiled like, an' says she, 'What ye don't know, Jamie, wud make a pretty big library.'

"Ay," says I, 'I haaven't aany doubt ov that, Anna.'

There was a loud knock at the door.

"Let him dundther," Mary said.

He put his hand behind his ear and asked eagerly: "What is 't?"

"Somcbody's dundtherin'."

"Let him go t' h——," he said angrily. "Th' tuk 'im frum Anna last time, th' won't take 'im frum me an' you, Mary."

Another and louder knock.

"It's Misthress Healy," came a voice.

Again his hand was behind his ear. The name was repeated to him.

"Misthress Healy, is it; well, I don't care a d——n if it was Misthress Toe-y!"

For a quarter of a century my sister has occupied my mother's chimney-corner, but it was vacant that night. She sat on my father's side of the fire. He and I sat opposite each other at the table—I on the same spot, on the same stool where I used to sit when her cup towards the close of the meal came travelling along the edge of the table, and where her hand with a crust in it would sometimes blindly grope for mine.

But she was not there. In all my life I have never seen a space so empty!

My father was a peasant, with all the mental and

physical characteristics of his class. My sister is a peasant woman who has been cursed with the same grinding poverty that cursed my mother's life. About my mother there was a subtlety of intellect and a spiritual quality that even in my ignorance was fascinating to me. I returned equipped to appreciate it, and she was gone. Gone, and a wide gulf lay between those left behind, a gulf bridged by the relation we have to the absent one more than by the relation we bore to each other.

We felt as keenly as others the kinship of the flesh, but there are kinships transcendently higher, nobler, and of a purer nature than the nexus of the flesh. There were things to say that had to be left unsaid. They had not travelled that way. The language of my experience would have been a foreign tongue to them. *She* would have understood.

"Wan night by th' fire here," Jamie said, taking the pipe out of his mouth, "she says t' me, 'Jamie,' says she, 'I'm clane done, jist clane done, an' I won't be long here.'

"'Och, don't spake s' downmouthed, Anna,' says I. 'Shure ye'll feel fine in th' mornin'.'

"'Don't palaver,' says she, and she lukt terrible serious.

"'My God, Anna,' says I, 'ye wudn't be lavin' me alone,' says I, 'I can't thole it.'

"'Yer more strong,' says she, 'an' ye'll live till he comes back—thin we'll be t'gether.'

He stopped there. He could go no further for several minutes.

"I hate a maan that gowls, but——"

"Go on," I said, "have a good one, and Mary and I will wash the cups and saucers."

"D'ye know what he wants t' help me fur?" Mary asked, with her mouth close to his ear."

"No."

"He wants t' dhry thim so he can kiss *her* cup whin he wipes it! Kiss her *cup*, ye mind; and right content with that!"

"I don't blame 'im," said he, "I'd kiss th' very groun' she walked on!"

As we proceeded to wash the cups, Mary asked: "Diz th' ministhers in America wash dishes?"

"Some of them."

"What kind?"

"My kind."

"What do th' others do?"

"The big ones lay corner-stones and the little ones lay foundations."

"Saints alive," she said, "an' what do th' hens do?"

"They clock" (hatch).

"Pavin' stones?"

"I didn't say pavin' stones!"

"Oh, ay," she laughed loudly.

"Luk here," Jamie said, "I want t' laugh too. Now, what th' — is't yer gigglin' at?"

I explained.

He smiled and said: "Jazus, bhoy, that reminds me ov Anna, she cud say more funny things than aany wan I iver know'd."

"And that reminds me," I said, "that the word you have just misused *she* always pronounced with a caress."

"Ay, I know rightly, but ye know I manc no harm, don't ye?"

"I know, but you remember when *she* used that word every letter in it was dressed in its best Sunday clothes, wasn't it?"

"Och, ay, an' I'd thravel twinty miles jist t' hear aany wan say it like Anna!"

"Well, I have travelled tens of thousands of miles, and I have heard the greatest preachers of the age,

but I never heard any one pronounce it so beautifully!"

"But as I was a-sayin', bhoy, I haaven't had a rale good laugh since she died; haave I, Mary?"

"I haaven't naither," Mary said.

"Ay, but ye've had double throuble, dear."

"We never let trouble rob us of laughter when I was here."

"Because whin ye wor here she was here too. In them days whin throuble came she'd tear it t' pieces an' make fun ov aych piece, begorra. Ye might glour an' glunch, but ye'd haave t' laugh before th' finish —shure ye wud!"

The neighbours began to knock again. Some of the knocks were vocal and as plain as language. Some of the more familiar gaped in the window.

"Hes he hed 'is bath yit?" asked McGrath, the ragman.

We opened the door and in marched the inhabitants of our vicinity for the second "crack."

This right of mine own people to come and go as they pleased suggested to me the thought that if I wanted to have a private conversation with my father I would have to take him to another town.

The following day we went to the churchyard together—Jamie and I. Over her grave he had dragged a rough boulder, and on it in a straggling, unsteady, amateur hand were painted her initials, and below them his own. He was unable to speak there, and maybe it was just as well. I knew everything he wanted to say. It was written on his deeply furrowed face. I took his arm and led him away.

Our next call was at Willie Withero's stone-pile. There, when I remembered the nights that I passed in my new world of starched linen, too good to shoulder a bundle of his old hammers, I was filled

with remorse. I uncovered my head and in an undertone muttered, "God forgive me."

"Great oul' bhoy was Willie," he said.

"Ay."

"Och, thim wor purty nice times whin he'd come in o' nights an' him an' Anna wud argie; but they're gone, clane gone, an' I'll soon be wi' them."

I bade farewell to Mary and took him to Belfast—for a private talk. Every day for a week we went out to the Cave Hill—to a wild and lonely spot where I had a radius of a mile for the sound of my voice. The thing of all things that I wanted him to know was that in America I had been engaged in the same fight with poverty that they were familiar with at home. It was hard for him to think of a wolf of hunger at the door of any home beyond the sea. It was astounding to him to learn that around me always there were thousands of ragged, starving people.

He just gaped and exclaimed: "It's quare, isn't it?"

We sat on the grass on the hill-side, conscious each of us that we were saying the things one wants to say on the edge of the grave.

"She speyed I'd live t' see ye," he said.

"She speyed well," I answered.

"Th' night she died somethin' wondtherful happened t' me. I wasn't as deaf as I am now, but I was purty deaf. D'y'e know, that night I cud hear th' aisiest whisper from her lips—I cud that. She groped fur m' han'; 'Jamie,' says she, 'it's nearly over, dear.'

"'God love ye,' says I.

"'Ay,' says she, 'if He'll jist love me as ye've done, it'll be fine.'

"Knowin' what a rough maan I'd been, I cudn't thole it.

“ ‘ Th’ road’s been gey rocky an’ we’ve made many, mistakes.’

“ ‘ Ay, I said, ‘ we’ve barged (scolded) a lot, Anna, but we didn’t mane it.’

“ ‘ No,’ says she, ‘ our crock ov love was niver dhrained.’

“ I brot a candle in an’ stuck it in th’ sconce so’s I cud see ‘er face.

“ ‘ We might haave done betther,’ says she, ‘ but sich a wee house, so many childther, an’ so little money.’

“ ‘ We war i’ hard up,’ says I.

“ ‘ We were never hard up in love, wor we?’

“ ‘ No, Anna,’ says I, ‘ but love dizn’t boil th’ kettle.’

“ ‘ Wud ye rather haave a boilin’ kittle than love if ye had t’ choose?’

“ ‘ Och, no, not at all, ye know rightly I wudn’t.’

“ ‘ Forby, Jamie, we’ve given Antrim moren’t such men than Lord Massarene.’

“ ‘ What’s that?’ says I.

“ ‘ A maan that loves th’ poorest craithers on earth an’ serves him.’

“ ‘ She had a gey good sleep afther that.

“ ‘ Jamie,’ says she, whin she awoke, ‘ was I ravin’?’

“ ‘ Deed no, Anna,’ says I.

“ ‘ I’m not ravin’ now, am I?’

“ ‘ Acushla, why do ye ask sich a question?’

“ ‘ Tell ‘im I didn’t like “fisher of men” as well as “th’ ploughman.” It’s aisy t’ catch them fish, it’s hard t’ plough up ignorance an’ superstition—tell ‘im that fur me, Jamie.’

“ ‘ Ay, I’ll tell ‘im, dear.’

“ ‘ Ye mind what I say’d t’ ye on th’ road t’ Antrim, Jamie—that “love is enough”?’

“ ‘ Ay.’

“ ‘ I tell ye again wi’ my dyin’ breath.’

"I leaned over an' kiss't 'er an'; she smiled at me. Ah, bhoy, if ye could haave seen that luk on 'er face, it was like a picture ov th' Virgin, it was that.

"Tell the childther there's only wan kind ov poverty, Jamie, an' that's t' haave no love in th' heart," says she.

"Ay, I'll tell thim, Anna," says I."

He choked up. The next thought that suggested itself for expression failed of utterance. The deep furrows on his face grew deeper. His lips trembled. When he could speak, he said: "My God, bhoy, we had to beg a coffin t' bury 'er in!"

"If I had died at the same time," I said, "they would have had to do the same for me!"

"How quare," he said.

I persuaded him to accompany me to one of the largest churches in Belfast. I was to preach there. That was more than he expected, and the joy of it was overpowering.

I do not remember the text, nor could I give at this distance of time an outline of the discourse: it was one of those occasions when a man stands on the borderland of another world. I felt distinctly the spiritual guidance of an unseen hand. I took her theme and spoke more for her approval than for the approval of the crowd.

He could not hear, but he listened with his eyes. On the street, after the service, he became oblivious of time and place and people. He threw his long, lean arms around my neck and kissed me before a crowd. He hoped Anna was around listening. I told him she was, and he said he would like to be "happed up" beside her, as he had nothing further to hope for in life.

In fear and trembling he crossed the Channel with me. In fear lest he should die in Scotland and they would not bury him in Antrim churchyard beside

Anna. We visited my brothers and sisters for several days. Every day we took long walks along the country roads. These walks were full of questionings. Big vital questions of life and death and immortality.

They were quaintly put: "There's a lot of balderdash about another world, bhoy. On yer oath, now, d'ye think there is wan?"

"I do."

"If there is, wud He keep me frum Anna jist because I've been kinda rough?"

"I am sure He wouldn't!"

"He wudn't be s' d——d niggardly, wud He?"

"Never! God is love, and love doesn't work that way!"

At the railway station he was still pouring in his questions.

"D'ye believe in prayer?"

"Ay."

"Well, jist ax sometimes that Anna an' me be together, will ye?"

"Ay."

A little group of curious bystanders stood on the platform watching the little trembling old man clinging to me as the tendril of a vine clings to the trunk of a tree.

"We have just one minute, father."

"Ay, ay, wan minute—my God, why cudn't ye stay?"

"There are so many voices calling me over the sea."

"Ay, that's thru'e."

He saw them watching him, and he feebly dragged me away from the crowd. He kissed me passionately again and again. The whistle blew.

"All aboard!" the guard shouted.

He clutched me tightly and clung to me with the

clutch of a drowning man. I had to extricate myself and spring on board. I caught a glimpse of him as the train moved out; despair and a picture of death was on his face. His lips were trembling, and his eyes were full of tears.

A few months later they lowered him to rest beside my mother. I want to go back some day and cover them with a slab of marble, on which their names will be cut, and these words:

“ Love is Enough.”

THE END



# **THE SOULS OF POOR FOLK**

**TO DOROTHY**

**IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF  
OTHER NIGHTS IN OTHER  
CHIMNEY CORNERS**



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## CHAPTER I

### OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

*“But I, being poor, have only my dreams,  
I spread my dreams under your feet ;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”*

W. B. YEATS.

NOBODY but an Ulsterman can understand the Ulster mind, and an Ulsterman is never more than half convinced that he knows himself. The farther away we get, the closer the view and the more accurate the judgment. When I returned to Antrim after an absence of a generation, I felt as if I were entering an unknown town in an unknown land.

In the old days, when information was less accessible than to-day, “over the hills and far away” was the expression that answered a multitude of questions about the outside world. Our hopes and aspirations were all to be realised, “over the hills and far away.” That was where great things happened. That was where everybody had work and enough to eat.

“What will ye do whin yer a maan, dear ?” my mother asked me when I was five, and I answered, “Oh, I’m goin’ over the hills an’ far away.”

Then there came a time, long years afterwards, when Antrim itself, with all its tender and sacred associations, became to me, “over the hills and far away !”

On my return I found changes at the top and changes at the bottom of social life. My old town

still lingers in the rear of the march of progress, but it has changed. Even the poorest of the poor have now enough to eat. That may seem commonplace to some. To me it was vital.

A political meeting had been held. That was an innovation. It was the only one I ever heard of being held there. It was an indication of a change of mind. I was sceptical that I would live to see that day. As a result of that meeting a Labour candidate was returned at the head of the polls for a local office. That was a revolution. In the days of my youth capacity or desire for either political analysis or social criticism was unthinkable.

Loyalty to the *status quo* used to be a fetish with us, submission to authority was our eleventh commandment and discontent was treason or worse. A new spirit, the spirit of the times, is making itself felt, and great changes are imminent. It is largely because of that, that I am going back to the period I know best to make a few more footnotes to the history of my people.

Poor as we were in those mid-Victorian days, we considered ourselves amongst the elect. Yet I well remember how nimbly and instinctively I hopped out of a policeman's line of vision as a sparrow hops out of the way of a motor-car in the crowded city streets.

Policemen, gamekeepers, and watchmen were our natural enemies. We had a right on public highways, but we were only half convinced of that. The moment we stepped off the street or the highway we were trespassers.

In my childish heart there grew a hatred—an implacable hatred—against the high stone walls that hid from our view the lake and the woods. I saw it a few weeks ago, and I hated it with a fiercer hatred, than I did when a boy. I am told it was built during the great famine in order to provide work. Better

a thousand times that a thousand men should die of starvation than that their children and children's children should be starved of that view which belongs to them !

A wise man once described poverty as " the sepulchre of brave designs." But we had no designs. We did have occasional longings for something larger and better, but they flickered out before they got any hold upon us. We had subservient minds and gave without grudge whatever respect was demanded of us. " Our betters " was no mere empty phrase. It had the sanction of religion, and was to us a religious duty. It never occurred to us that respect might have a reciprocal relation. We expected nothing, and getting it, were not disappointed.

The great institutions of our town were, the church, the pub, the court-house, and the pawnshop. With the pub and the court-house I had no personal experience, but the church and the pawnshop I knew well. The art of the town was centred in the church, and apart from the church services, the church itself had a refining influence. Of course, there were crowds of us who never entered it after Baptism, but to those of us who did, it was a power in the creation of ideals and the formation of character.

My mind being a little ahead of my social status, I pushed myself into situations from which I was forced to retire. Even when I acquired boots and a paper collar I was too conspicuous by the scantiness of my outfit to get the full benefit.

Illiteracy was a further handicap. Added to that, I was an inveterate asker of questions. I helped old John McConkey to organise a temperance society. I had done all the work ; John, himself, was my first convert. When we gathered around a table to elect officers John informed me that I couldn't be elected to any of the " main offices. "

"Why?" I asked, with a guilty feeling, as if I had been caught red-handed drinking whisky. John looked at me. He had only one eye, but it was full of tender solicitude and pity for me.

"Bekase," said he, "yer too d—d ignorant, m' bhoy!"

I acknowledged the truth of the charge and nominated John for president.

Catholics and Protestants had no dealings with each other. They were farther apart than the Jews and Samaritans were. I cannot remember a single instance in which the people of Antrim met as citizens or townspeople. We hated each other's religion and became irritated at every public expression of it. There was no neutral ground upon which the majority and the minority could meet.

Only in retrospect and from a distance does one discover that the scheme of things left much to be desired. In it and of it there is nothing unusual. We were blind to our own shortcomings.

And yet my dearest chum was a Roman Catholic. We never discussed politics or religion—each was sure in his own mind that the other would be ultimately damned. We had an occasional good-natured cross-fire of banter and humorous ridicule, but never a serious discussion.

"Where wuz yer religion before oul Henry th' Eighth?" he would say, and having no strong defence for "Oul Henry," I would reply: "Where wuz yer face before it wuz washed?"

The percentage of those who were chronically hungry in our community was small. My people were of that percentage, and yet we never whined over our lot. We did not view the world through stained-glass windows, neither did we see it, as my mother would say, "through dirty specs."

We were happy-go-lucky folks, taking the smiles of

good fortune or the bludgeonings of chance just as they came, without undue elation or depression.

## II

“Sir,” said Dr. Johnson, in answering Hume, who believed that those who were happy were equally happy, “that those who are happy are equally happy is not true. A peasant and a philosopher may be equally satisfied, but not equally happy. Happiness consists in the multiplicity of agreeable consciousness. A peasant has not a capacity for equal happiness with a philosopher.”

When Johnson talked about peasants he was guessing. He knew little about them and that little was of a second-hand variety. A philosopher may have a supernormal capacity for happiness and be as miserable as the devil. Outsiders imagine “the man below” has a good time, generally, in Ireland, but we always looked upon him as the most miserable of beings.

It isn’t what we possess that counts ; it’s the use we make of our possessions, and a big use of a few capacities is better than a small use of a great number.

Sir Walter Scott tells a story of an Eastern Caliph who was advised by his physician to find a happy man and wear his shirt as a cure for ennui. Despairing of finding such a man in his own unhappy land, he made a tour of Europe. Italy, France, and Spain were covered without results. In England he found John Bull quarrelling and grousing over the high cost of living. In Scotland they were having a shindy over theology, so he crossed over to Ireland. The fed-up monarch was convinced at once that the Irish were the happiest people in the world. One day he heard a man singing in the fields as he worked. The psychological moment had arrived. “Seize him ! Seize him !” said the excited man. His retainers at once

seized Pat and stripped him, but alas ! the happy man was without a shirt !

If Dr. Johnson's "multiplicity of agreeable consciousness" be rated at one hundred, by what percentage would that maximum be reduced—in his own case—by lack of a shirt ? Probably fifty per cent. In the case of an Irish peasant the reduction would be about five per cent. In my own case it would have been about two and a half.

Are there any scales by which can be weighed and the difference determined, between the joy, pleasure, or happiness experienced by W. G. Grace in a cricket match and that experienced by a ragged peasant boy who plays with pot-sticks for wickets and a fence rail for a bat ?

A large catalogue might be made out. We had a multitude of social pleasures amongst ourselves. Despite the "peelers," the laws, the customs, and traditions ; despite the lack of a thousand and one things which seem necessary to other people's existence, we were happy mortals.

In the summer we had the wild fruits, the river, and the lough. We had an idea—probably left over from the tribal period or the stone age—that there were no property rights in turnips or sloes, haws or blackberries. We felt that the crab-apples were our gifts from Providence. Of course, if the owner of the land turned up, we scampered off.

There was no law to prevent us from enjoying a sunset, a cloud effect, or the wealth of golden sunshine. The wild flowers were ours, and we could look over the walls into the gardens of the more highly favoured. Besides, we had a garden of our own. It only measured 36 by 12 inches, but my mother grew nasturtiums, pansies, geraniums, and a currant bush in it. She used to say that in the growing of flowers love was as necessary as water. That seemed foolish

to us. But somehow when she went away flowers ceased to grow there. Something was missing ; we could not tell what it was. Less and less grew in it every year, and finally it was swept away altogether.

## III

The beginnings of routine began before I was ten. To be tied down to hours was to me like being put in a cage. Of course, selling papers isn't a job—it's a point of departure at which nobody ever intends to remain. I began there, but my first real job was gathering gooseberries. I had a weakness for them. When I got the job of gathering a small garden crop, I began to see visions and dream dreams.

The old gentleman who owned the garden took me out and gave me instructions. He hovered around all the forenoon. In the afternoon he had business elsewhere, and had to leave me. Before leaving, he told me that in his absence I was to whistle, and keep on whistling until he returned. This was something not nominated in the bond, but I whistled and whistled until my mouth was sore. I stopped once just to see if anything would happen, and something did. A lady came out and took the old man's place. To have such solicitation and care literally showered on me in my first job had a wholesome moral effect. I whistled on and on with a conscience that would have served me well under other circumstances, if I could have kept it up.

The old man rewarded me for this by giving me a job in the harvest time. At least I looked upon it as a reward. I was one of four boys making straps with which to tie the bundles of corn. It was hard work to keep up with the reapers. In order to keep us at top speed, the old man had a pail of milk at one end of the field and a pail of water at the other. If we

kept up close he would send us when thirsty to the milk. If we lagged behind he would send us to the water.

At dinner time my gooseberry conscience collapsed ! When no one was looking I changed the pails. I was foolish enough to let the other boys into the secret, with the result that they shamefully maledgered and lagged behind. The milk pail was soon emptied. At the close of the day we sped off to the main road in a criminal state of mind.

Next morning he stood us up in a line like militiamen, and read out the sentence. Being a strict Presbyterian, he opened up the family Bible and in stentorian tones read : "All liars shall have their place in the lake that burneth for ever and ever !" We resigned, under a cloud !

If I had been enmeshed in the toils of the law in my youth, my crime would have been committed to satisfy my hunger. There were rabbits, hares, and pheasants in plenty, and I knew where they were and how to get them. Why did I not run the risk ? In more highly-civilised communities and in many savage tribes, the right to live is a distinct consciousness. Braver men and savages fight for it. Our mental attitude towards life was of such a character that the right to live had no standing whatever.

We had two alternatives to theft or violence—the poorhouse and degradation by begging. Death by starvation was preferable to the first, and theft was more honourable than the second. Antrim poorhouse was crowded to the doors, fifty years ago. To-day, they are wondering what to do with it. There are no paupers. What has happened ? A new democratic conscience overspreads the world. It has reached Antrim. Part of that conscience is the right to life. I can hardly say we were too cowardly to assert it in those days. We were bespunked, servile, and sub-

missive to an invisible authority, which to us was both law and gospel. It wasn't a case of making the most of a bad job. In our stupidity we never imagined it a bad job. Even if we had, we had no power to mend it. Our fathers having no property, had no votes. Nor would votes have helped the situation, for they would have been used for religious, and not for economic or political purposes.

## IV

About the first of November, each year, there was a falling in attendance at the Sunday School of the Parish Church, and a corresponding increase in the Sunday School of the Methodists in the Kill Entry. Each year we were warned. Each year we turned a deaf ear to the warning. We were not deserters or "turncoats." Our annual lapse was not due to disloyalty. The Methodists used to give a Christmas Soiree. Hot coffee and buns were served, with an address by an escaped missionary as a sort of spiritual salad. The Methodists knew all about our needs and capacities. They were generous to a fault, and we denizens of the alleys just took advantage of the buns they annually cast upon the turgid waters of the underworld.

About the first of January we slunk back again and rehabilitated ourselves. I presume we were catalogued in both organisations as "floating population." But that hot coffee and the buns were worth all the disgrace they cost.

The Methodist watch-night service was of fascinating interest to me. It was a rather doleful, sombre occasion, but I liked such things. They appealed to the imagination. During the last half-hour of the year, the Methodists used to hold an evangelistic service at the gates of the Parish Church. It wasn't one of those

“weather permitting” affairs. It was held weather or no weather.

I think the leaders used to look upon us proletarians of the Parish Church as being as much in need of a “sound” conversion as any of the old tatterdemalions who hung around the pubs. So they warned us in stentorian tones. I confess I liked this hell-fire admonition. It made me shiver, but it also reconciled me to the frosty midnight air and the cold pavement under my bare feet. There was no levity. Those inclined to that sort of indulgence remained in the little chapel and sprinkled cayenne pepper in the hymn books to give the saints a sneeze on their return from the open-air meeting.

I remember one night being led by old “Chisty” McDowell back to the chapel. He took my hand and held it all the way. I remember, too, what I was thinking about. I had an idea that he would get to heaven before I did. I imagined myself at the gate. If there was any fuss or hesitation on the part of the gate-keeper, I would send in for “oul Chisty,” and if he had any influence I knew he would use it on my behalf.

The closing sentences of the leader were solemn and sometimes terrifying “A few moments yet remain of the old year,” he would say. “You have yet time. This voice may never again warn you on a watch-night. Let your sinful life pass away with the old year—it is going, going, going—it is gone ! ”

How terrible the sounds of the church bell as it clanged out the old year ! How solemn the thoughts of the little crowd as it walked up the dark street to the chapel !

In order to enjoy this midnight meeting I had to have a special writ of indulgence from the chimney corner. All other nights the ringing of the curfew bell at 9 p.m. brought me home. There were a few

other special permits. There were a few thrills of another kind. The McCormacks—a band of travelling players—came to our town once a year. They put up their theatre on the barrack square, and gave us a whole week's melodrama. The last time I enjoyed this beggar's Opera, I did so by virtue of the fact that I blew the bellows for Johnny Cooper, the nailer—twopence a day—for a week. I don't think the performances would have elevated a cow, but they thrilled us for the time being, and formed just one more gateway to the world that lay beyond—"over the hills and far away."

There were other thrills. One of the great spiritual and intellectual treats of my youth was a lecture on the *Pilgrim's Progress*, by a man who brought the pilgrim journey closely home to us by the aid of a magic lantern. I got more benefit from it than from all the sermons I ever heard. Most sermons were a pious bore to our dull intellects, anyway. They were preached in a language we did not understand, and concerned themselves with themes utterly beyond our ken.

I do not believe that any community in the three kingdoms was ever so completely left to its own resources. "Our betters" felt no responsibility towards us. If they had only known that they had the power to lift our somewhat sordid lives to a higher plane, they might have given us a little more of themselves. We had capacity for greater things. We could have been stimulated to greater intellectual effort, and it would have taken so little time or effort to do it.

"Who gives himself with his alms  
Gives three,  
Himself, his hungry brother,  
And me."

Lowell

## CHAPTER II

### THEMSELVES

#### I

IT was the popular minister of an unpopular church (Unitarian) who used to give lectures on the history of Antrim. From him we learned that the great men of the past, whose names were connected with the old town, were, an archbishop, a great theologian, a learned professor, and a poet.

The archbishop couldn't help being born in Antrim, but in his autobiography he could avoid mentioning the fact—and did so. The learned professor extended the frontiers of the knowledge of his day. Throughout his long career he seems to have had an affectionate regard for his birthplace. The poet cut short what promised to be a brilliant career by drowning himself in the river that flows through the town. The theologian, having been chased out of England on theological grounds, took refuge with our people and preached with freedom in the Parish Church for some years.

But the men who were great townsmen in my youth are unknown to fame. Their names are not found in the pages of history. They are enrolled in the musty records of the churches and in the faded, worm-eaten books of the tax gatherers—and some of them can be found only in the latter.

John Conlon was the town Process Server—a minor court official whose duty it was to deliver court summonses. The Conlons were our kind of folk. They lived in a four-roomed house on the front street, but despite that superior social status, we were the most intimate friends.

When John started off each morning with his bundle of trouble under his arm, all the neighbours looked his way. He was a model of neatness. He wore a tall hat, and by virtue of that we called him "Mister." The hat was always shiny—on the outward journey. His black cravat was neatly tied, his gray hair was parted at the back, and his whiskers were always neatly trimmed. He was rather short, but walked with a military stride, head well poised and his shoulders pressed back.

Few knew the secret of his scrupulously careful toilet. I did, because I knew Eliza, his wife. She was John's valet, housekeeper, and devoted wife. In John there was an aristocratic strain. Eliza was a proletarian. There were times when John returned from the work of the day with his beaver slightly tilted to one side, and his Wellingtons got in each other's way. It was not a daily occurrence, but frequent enough to make it well known. On such occasions John talked as if he had just been lowered from the seats of the mighty into our midst at the bottom of the world. He would remind Eliza of the gulf that yawned between their social stations and suggest as he coughed and cleared his throat that he had come down.

"Wasn't it nice ov ye, dear!" she would say, as she pulled off his Wellingtons and made him comfortable in the corner. His language was always correct, his words chosen with care and discrimination. No magistrate that I knew had such a gift of fine language. John did not need to inform us of his superiority. We had a respect for him that bordered on reverence.

"Eliza, my dear," he would say on the morning after the night before, "I have a dim recollection of having used language in your presence last night that was unbecoming a gentleman. I offer you an unqualified apology, my dear!"

"God love ye, dear," she would reply, "shure I

knew rightly it was because ye'd haad a haard day!"

"You must put it down to the inebrious influences of my legal vocation—I am a limb of the law—a lower limb."

These exchanges were usually delivered as Eliza was putting the finishing touches to his cravat or brushing his frayed frock coat. No aristocrat was ever better groomed, no epicure ever had more attention paid to his table. The cottage was small, the floor was of mud, the stones around the wide, open hearth were whitewashed. The shelves of delft were neatly arranged. There was an air of scrupulous cleanliness such as was found in no other house in our immediate neighbourhood. After breakfast his tall hat and staff were handed to him, and with his leather case full of trouble he went off on his daily round.

"I need not tell you, Mr. ——," John would say, as he entered a house with a summons, "how embarrassing it is for me to enter your abode as a mere cog in the machinery of the law!"

"Don't mention it, Mister Conlon," he would be told, "shure it's yourself that's as welcome as th' flowers o' May! Sit down, sir!" No matter where he went, no matter how bitter the legal fight, his exquisite English, his gracious manner, his genuine sympathy, won him an instant welcome. Often the welcome was washed down with something, and it was this something that tipped his high hat on the side of his head and released his pent-up oratory on the road home.

John made a great impression upon me when I was quite a small boy. He was an aristocrat who belonged to us. He was a picturesque figure in our drab community, and we were very proud of him—especially as he sallied forth in the morning. And when he was ill and the neighbours were speculating on his status

in the next world, I asked my mother who would brush his wonderful tall hat if he got there before Eliza.

"Well, dear," she replied, "in the next world John's hat'll be made of gray mist, an' won't need brushin'!"

But Mrs. Mulholland smacked her thin lips and half in fun and wholly in firm conviction, said, if we had hats at all they'd have to be cast iron "to stand the hate," which was a little hard on John, to say nothing of the rest of us—but she belonged to St. Comgall's.

The absence of John made a big gap in our wee world. I remember the conflicting thoughts that surged through my childish mind when they told me that John had gone. I wondered whether, after all, those occasions when his hat just could not maintain its accustomed balance, would matter. My father was not quite orthodox, but in the course of time his opinion became for me a definite conviction.

"Shure God's a rale Gentleman," he said, "an'll tak afther our John, ay, He will that, just as shure as gun's iron!"

Sam Johnson baked bread for a living. His career was religious leadership. He was a philanthropist—in a quiet way. I knew two men who for many years wore Sam's cast-off trousers. I saw these same garments in their third estate when they were worn by the boys in these households.

Sam was mortally afraid that any one should ever find out that he gave these things away. Despite the solemn promise he always received from recipients of his kindness, half the town knew all about his good deeds. When his beautiful daughter, Elizabeth, became old enough to keep the shop, she became his almoner. I was in that shop a few weeks ago. A younger daughter keeps it now, Sam and Elizabeth having gone long since to their reward. One thing I wanted to know—only one.

"Excuse me," I said, "for asking, but is that the same treacle box that was there when I was a boy?"

"Yes," said Sam's daughter, "the very same."

Out of the storhouse of memory I brought them—Sam and Elizabeth. By the help of the imagination I placed them there, one at a time, with their hands on the lever, and beneath the opened half of a penny bap!

It was a doleful day for our poor neighbourhood when the Johnsons outgrew their small business and moved down into High Street!

In the old days, when Sam used to get his winter's supply of hay, we always helped to put it into the barn. What a joy to take a header into it, as it lay in the street! How we tumbled, cavorted, and played in it. He knew our limited resources, and invariably rejoiced at our simple, short-lived pleasures.

Sam Johnson was an Irishman in whom there was no guile. The shortcomings of our great men were as familiar to us as our old boots. We knew the weakness of his lordship. It was an open book to us. We knew the exploiters and spoilers and profiteers of those days. Of Sam we knew only good. Presbyterianism of the stricter sort had starched his spiritual column. His dignity could not be trifled with. He looked austere, but he had a great heart, and his word was as good as his bond.

John Kirk, the grocer, was an outstanding figure. As a boy I looked upon him as our greatest political heretic. As I look back I am convinced that my judgment was based on the fact that he did his own thinking. Our point of view was ready-made. We inherited it. We hated things Irish and loved with a burning fanaticism things English—just because they were English. On Politics and Religion we had a closed mind. Those of us who had a chance to go to school were forced to study the history of England. We

knew nothing about the history of Ireland. We didn't want to know. Ireland was Catholic. England was Protestant. Rags and dirt and ignorance was our common lot. Our representatives in Parliament were all of the landlord class. None of them were ever even remotely associated with movements for the uplift of the submerged. They didn't know we were submerged. We didn't know ourselves.

The finer aspect of this closed Ulster mind was that it had no selfish purpose or incentive. Few of us would have changed our mind for material gain.

In our part of the town only three houses subscribed for daily papers. Other papers came—weekly budgets of Romance and adventure—but of the affairs of the world we knew nothing, cared nothing. Beaconsfield was our political demigod, Gladstone, Mephistopheles, and Parnell our Catiline. We never heard them, never saw them, never read anything they said. Our learned men knew, and that was sufficient for us.

• We were taught to be content with that condition of life that God had mapped out for us. We were.

God, according to that principle or sophistry, had consigned us to ignorance and poverty out of which only a few ever escaped. When I dissociated that idea from God and righteousness, I remembered John Kirk, and was able in a measure to understand him. Whether I agreed with him or not, is another question. He had escaped from the fetters of ready-made opinions. He no longer wore the second-hand intellectual garments of his ancestors. He no longer bowed in the House of Rimmon.

## II

• Mr. George Clarke, of "The Steeple," was the magistrate I knew best. I knew the others by sight, but a regrettable accident gave me a more intimate

view of our senior interpreter and dispenser of the law.

The Steeple is Antrim's Round Tower, and is on the lawn of Mr. Clarke's house, just beyond the railway station. There is a tradition that many centuries ago the Round Tower was in the centre of the town. Being the most perfect of all the Round Towers of Ireland, it would seem to men of ordinary mind that it should have remained a town possession.

Mr. Clarke was a quiet, austere-looking man, who, as he moved in and out of our streets, never seemed very familiar with anybody. His brother magistrate was Thomas Montgomery, whose reputation was of a similar character. Seldom did any of our townsmen attempt to express themselves in verse, but so pronounced was the neutrality of these worthies that the following was passed from house to house when I was a boy :

*“ George of the Steeple,  
And Tom of Burchill—  
They do little good,  
But they do little ill.”*

“ Tom of Burchill ” I knew by sight only. Mr. Clarke spoke to me once, but I made no reply. The circumstances would not admit of an ordinary exchange of civilities or an exchange of opinion.

In one of Mr. Clarke's meadows there were a dozen of the best sloe bushes in the parish. One afternoon I was ensconced in one of them when a dog barked. I looked around, and saw Mr. Clarke approaching as if he were in a hurry. I had business elsewhere at the same moment. I was only twelve at the time, but was more than a match at sprinting with a man over sixty. He appealed to the dog, and the beast responded. I had a start of about twenty yards. I left Mr Clarke farther and farther behind, but the dog was gaining on me every moment. A deep ditch or “ sheuch,” as

we used to call it, lay in my path to freedom. On the other side was a fence. I cleared the 'sheuch, but simultaneously as I grabbed the fence the dog grabbed me. Happily for me the seat of my trousers was rather baggy, and he got a mouthful of that—held on to it, and still has it for aught I know to the contrary, for I left it with him and escaped. That was the nearest I ever came to social intercourse with a fellow churchman and leading light of my beloved town. The sloe bushes are still there.

John Darragh was our village blacksmith. When I used to stand dreaming at the smithy door, watching the flames spurt out of the live coals, old John had passed from the anvil to the bar. He was old and gray. He had only one eye, and he used that to run a public house, leaving the smithy to his two sons.

John was a Catholic, but he didn't work much at it. But when he did favour St. Comgall's with his swarthy presence, he wore a tall hat. He never wore it at funerals or celebrations. If he had we would have called him "Mister."

He was profoundly respected by our townspeople, especially by the boys. He had a fine group of gooseberry bushes, and could cover a wider range and a longer distance with that one eye of his than any other man could with a telescope.

There were not many outstanding figures in the town proper, but outside there were men who, in a measure, influenced its life and character. Mr. Chaine was one of these. He owned the bleaching greens a few miles away, and employed a goodly number of men and women.

These were our supermen. When one of them was elected to Parliament we gathered around the big house to cheer, and perhaps get a mug of tea and a bun, but we were socially connected to them with a rope of sand and industrially linked to their

interests by a cash nexus. We drank wine from the common chalice at the Communion Table, but our communion began and ended there.

Johnston of Ballykillbeg was our great Orange leader, whose face was on our cups and saucers and plates. I deem it not an exaggeration to say that we worshipped him, in a way. Few of us around our quarter had ever seen him, but that may have been a factor in our worship. His name was on our lips, and every time it was mentioned we felt like cheering. If we had spared a little of our zeal and emotion for New Testament characters, we might have been better off. That, of course, was foreign to our thought, and if it ever had occurred to us it would have been offset by the fiction that but for him we would have no New Testament at all.

We were being saved by him and his followers from something mysterious and dreadful. We never knew just what it was, and to have asked what we were being saved for would have been rank heresy—and we were all of one mind in congealed orthodoxy.

### III

John Rae was a strange, erratic personality in those days. He was a Belfast lawyer of extraordinary ability. He was reported to be a terror to juries, and sometimes found himself in the county jail in consequence. Whenever he came to Antrim he was not only sure of an audience in the dingy court-house, but a gallery that followed him from the station.

A relation of ours got into trouble once, and Anna urged Jamie to betake himself to Belfast and see John Rae. He did, and John came. I was at the station with a hundred others—mostly boys and girls—when he arrived. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, gray-haired man. He had a very large forehead, and his

great shock of hair was brushed back over his head. He wore a soft felt hat with a very wide brim, and a huge military cape.

Wee Mr. McTammany, who had charge of a solicitor's office in Antrim, met him and escorted him to the court-house. They walked in the middle of the road—the wee man almost trotting alongside the giant with the military stride.

Jim Suffern was charged with striking a blow that deprived Dan Heggarty of an eye. It was a Fair Day street brawl of the Orange-Fenian variety.

John Rae's opening address was spectacular, sensational, and characteristic.

"Gentlemen, shopkeepers, and others of the jury," he said, laying his portmanteau on the table, "Her Britannic Majesty's Orange-Fenian Attorney-General for Ulster presents his case and compliments to you!" Taking his nightshirt out and holding it up as he spoke, he continued: "I have just emerged from the unhallowed precincts of the county jail, where, being the guest of Her Majesty, I was fed on the essence of shamrocks and sheep's trotters. You will observe I have come prepared for a journey to your Bridewell across the way if necessary!" His voice was loud, his gestures almost ridiculous. There were interruptions from the bench and scowls from the jury, but they only warmed him up.

The last witness was the complainant, Heggarty. Rae reserved his heavy guns for him.

"You have confessed that on the day in question you had been drinking whisky. Now, Heggarty, tell the jury like an honest man whether you were over-loaded or half-shot on that occasion!"

"Nayther," said Heggarty.

"You hadn't lost your equilibrium?"

"I hadn't any to lose!"

"Thank you. That is quite frank."

"What is it?" asked Heggarty.

"Since you had none, it is immaterial. How many men were in the shindy?"

"About a dozen."

"All busy at the same time?"

"Yes."

"The forces of Orangeism and Fenianism were equally divided, I presume?"

"Maybe."

"Did you keep a record of the blows?"

"No."

"Wasn't it possible?"

"No—not for me, anyway!"

"But you kept a record of one blow, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And that was the one you got on the eye?"

"Ay."

"You kept no record of the one you gave?"

"No."

"But you did give a few?"

"Yes?"

"Good ones?"

"I hope so."

"But not quite so effective as this cardinal punch on your optic that was?"

"No."

"You have been in McGuckin's public house since the fight?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that every time you have been there you have carefully scrutinised the labels on the bottles?"

"Maybe."

"And you have been a keen observer of things across the road—that is, you have tried to make a better use of one eye than you previously did of two?"

"I dunno."

"But you never used to care what was on the labels before."

"Oh, not particularly."

"I will not intrude into your private affairs, Heggarty, but I believe you have really made closer observations in your own home than you did previously. Is that not true?"

"Maybe."

"And can you deny on oath that your wife hasn't more closely studied your face since the fight?"

"What has that to do with the case?" interrupted the prosecution.

"Just this," said Rae, "that a man's eye is not in his hinder parts, but in his face, and the crux of the case is an eye. Come, Heggarty, on your oath, tell the jury whether or not your wife has, or has not, paid more attention to your face than before the fight?"

"Maybe."

"I thought so. That sums up the case for the defence. Now, gentlemen and others of the jury, here is the kernel of the nut you have to crack. It is Fair Day in Antrim. Towards the close of the day, when tongues are loosened and men hanker as only men of Antrim can hanker for something sensational with which to wind up a glorious day—what more natural than for the followers of Billy to express an ardent desire for a change of climate for His Holiness? What is there in our common, muddled existence more natural, than for admirers of His Holiness, of whom I am one, to resent this suggestion and desire his retention in the colder atmosphere of the Vatican? The complainant resented the suggestion that the change was either necessary or desirable. He did more: he rammed his resentment on somebody's façade with a punch. That was the curtain raiser to the Donnybrook Fair, described here in detail. Is anything more

natural in Ireland than what followed ? Twenty-four fists flying in all directions. All at it all at one time, all bent on making an impression. No man armed with false knuckles or shillalahs. Just the common horny hands of toilers doing with their might what their hands found to do ! Of course, these are the activities of cavemen, but in this rumpus one cave man is singled out because he accomplished by accident what all of them desire to do deliberately. Gentlemen, an angel from heaven would have lost his mind trying to find out which of them planted the optic blow.

“ But you have the evidence in front of you that the blow that put one light out, lit another and a brighter one. Heggarty lost an eye—he says he did—I haven’t lifted that green patch to find out. I take his word for it. But note what happens. With one eye and a green curtain over the other window, he begins to use his mind. He observes things to which he had been as blind as a bat before. For the first time in his life he is awake to the beauty of nature. He knows now by his own careful observation that a hen-sparrow is not a peacock, and all that is infinitesimal compared to the fact that his wife begins to notice him. What a joy to a man who has become as common as old boots to be now the cynosure of his wife’s admiring eyes ! Why, gentlemen, there isn’t a hen-pecked husband in the three kingdoms who wouldn’t have one eye knocked out before bedtime if he could accomplish the same results ! Heggarty, my boy, the Orange-Fenian Attorney-General for Ulster congratulates you and your wife and children to the third and fourth generation !

“ Gentlemen, you will render a verdict on the evidence—the evidence of the complainant. He struck the blow that started the fracas—the fracas that shut an eye opened his mind, and enlarged his miserable soul. If somebody had done that to me when I was

his age, I would be now on the woolsack in the House of Lords, instead of swinging a convict's shirt in the fetid air of Atrim courthouse.

The jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty."

They have all, long since, passed into the great silence. Others have taken their places. John Rae went out by his own hand. The great and the near great, the wise and otherwise, the rich and the poor, all occupy about the same space in the ground, and their doings and sayings become more dim as the years go by.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE BOG-QUEEN'S FLITTIN'

##### I

**I**N the long winter nights, when a turf fire burned brightly on the hearth and Jamie had put his shoemaker's bench aside for the day, we used to watch Anna's face with the keenest interest. We did not need to ask many questions—we could tell her moods as easily as we could tell the time by looking at the face of the clock. The mood we looked most eagerly for was the story-telling mood. Her stories shortened the night and gave a weird, mystic interest to a life that was not overladen with excitements. For the social hours of the evening a candle was lit and placed in the tin sconce that hung in her corner. Sometimes she read a story from a weekly newspaper—the only paper we ever saw in those days.

As we sat on the floor in front of the fire we were usually a sleepy lot, and as surely as Anna *read* a story, half of us children would stretch ourselves out on the floor and drop off to sleep. But when she *told* a story

—whether it was a folk story she had heard in her youth or an original one spun out of the fabric of her own mind, we were wideawake from start to finish. Our interest was not held wholly by the story. She had a personality that gave the story charm and held us by its spell, helping us to forget many things of which the poor are acutely conscious down where we lived, at the bottom of the social world.

One never-to-be-forgotten night, when the snow lay deep on the streets and the wind howled in the alleys around us, Willie Withero, the stone-breaker, dropped in for a "crack," and we moved closer together and made room for him. The kettle hung on the chain, singing, and we were in high hopes that a cup of tea would be forthcoming, before we were sent off to bed. Withero's arrival enhanced the hope. He had a subtle vein of humour, and his quiet, humorous hints always produced results.

"I suppose," said Withero, "that ye boil the water for to-morrow's tay the night before, now, Anna?"

"Oh, no," Anna said adroitly. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, Willie; we have the tay the night before, and use our imaginations on the followin' mornin'!"

"Save us alive," he said, "isn't that a fine notion—and savin'?"

"Your mouth looks awful wathery, Willie," Jamie chimed in—as anxious as Withero.

"Oh, ay," Willie sighed. "Me inside thinks me throat is cut, and that's no sauncy feelin'!"

"Ye might as well make it, dear," Jamie said, "because as sure as gun's iron he'll palaver here all night and wind up by scalding his throat with that boiling wather!"

"It's the sinsible man ye are, Jamie," was the stone-breaker's reply, "an' that's no feerie story!"

The tea was made and shared around as we sat

on the floor. Withero drank his in about three keys mostly in G. Jamie added a few turfs to the fire. That was the invariable sign that as soon as Anna finished her tea he would insist good-naturedly on her telling a story.

Our minds became active at once. Should we beg for an old favourite, or take our chances on her own selection? Before we could give any expression to the fitful thoughts that flitted through our minds, Jamie had taken the initiative.

"I don't think Willie ever heard ye tell the 'Queen's Flittin'," Anna. Would ye just as soon tell that as anything else?"

This was an old favourite, and we backed up the suggestion as we settled ourselves in a tensely strung-up attitude of attention. There was a light in her large, dreamy eyes, her face was encased in a halo of white ruffled linen and an atmosphere of the tenderest mysticism filled us all with a sort of reverence and awe. In the telling of the story she shortened the participles and added to her natural tone just the quaintest touch of an Irish brogue.

How real the wee people in that land of fairies were to us! Being highly sensitised and of clear, undimmed vision, she had missed most acutely that which she never possessed, and her story-telling made up for much in our lives and in her own. To doubt the reality of the world of fancy through which she led us, would have been to doubt our own existence.

## II

"There was a King of Ulster a long time agone, and he was purty hard up for a Queen. He was gey particular about beauty, and in them days there was a bad famine of good looks. One day he was walkin along be the side of the lake, jist switherin' about

nothin', when he seen a quare caper on the quiet wather by his side. A flock of wild white geese dhrapped suddenly into the lake with a splash and a yell like the laughter of childther. Jist as quick as ye could say, 'Jack Robinson,' the white geese had turned into a wheen of the purtiest girls the King had ever set eyes on. He hid for a minute behind some bushes, jist to get a good look, and to do some more switherin'. As he did so he spied half a dozen bundles of girls' clothes.

"' Bedad, they're fairies,' says he to himself. So just for divilment he grabbed one of the bundles and hid himself in a bunch of big ferns. After splashin' for a while, the girls came out. When one saw that her things were gone she cried and carried on terrible. Jist then a wee robin came hoppin' down the path, and a bright notion came into the girl's mind.

"' Robin, dear,' says she, 'if ye'll help me find me clothes, I'll put crumbs on me window-sill for ye for a year and a day!'

"' The robin wagged his tail a bit, and then led her to the ferns where the King was hiding.

"' It's undacent,' says she to the King, when she saw him, 'to be holdin' a colleen's clothes like that.' And with that she turned into a white goose.

"' Well,' sayd he, 'I'm King of Ulster, and I'm lookin' for a Queen, and I thought maybe you'd be a Cupid's guide-post and show me where to go.'

"' Where have ye looked?' says she.

"' In the coorts of other kings and amongst the quality of the four Provinces,' says he.

"' Musha, that's no place for to be lookin' for a Queen,' says the goose-girl. 'Go out into the countrhy and see the girls that be creelin' turf in the bogs and the girls that dhrive home the cows. Shure beauty alone is but skin deep, and that's what ye get in coorts and castles. But a useful life is a natural life,

and a life lived with nature fills the heart with music, and a heart that's full of music and love needs no paint on the face nor dhrity oil on fine clean hair.

“ ‘Acushla, ye do be talkin’ like a fairy !’ says the King.

“ ‘It’s jist goose sinse,’ says she.”

“ Did she cackle or jist spake ?” I ventured to inquire.

“ Dhry up, ye wee gandther !” the stone-breaker said, as he spat into the fire and dunched me with his elbow.

Anna proceeded.

“ Well, the King handed over the clothes, and turned his back while she put them on. When he turned around again, he was alone—except for the wee robin who sat on the lowest branch of an ash-tree singing a *Te Deum* over the good fortune of a year’s provisions.

“ Afther switherin’ and sweatin’ for a few days, the King dhressed himself as a boughal and—”

► “ What’s a boughal ?” I asked—keeping an eye on Withero’s elbow.

“ It’s jist a bhoy that works, instead of playin’ shinny, for a livin’,” she said, and went on—“ Dressed as a boughal, he thravelled over the five counties around Lough Neagh till he came to Antrim. Here he got shelter for the night in the abbey down near where the castle now is. Next mornin’ he told the abbot, who could keep a secret, about his ‘quare’ quest.

• “ ‘About a mile from the Round Tower,’ says the abbot, ‘ ye will come across a peat bog. Ye might thry your luck there, and may the saints direct yet’

“ With his pack on his back, his stick in his hand, and the luck of God in his heart, he dandthered off in the direction of the tower. Not far from the ould steeple, he came to a bog where men were diggin’ and girls were creelin’ turf. The King asked a man

on the road about the bog, and who its owner might be.

“ ‘ It’s the turf bog of Dennis Mulvany,’ says the man, ‘ and that’s himself in his shirt sleeves.’

“ ‘ The top of the mornin’, Dennis,’ he said, as he looked over the hedge at the bogman.

“ ‘ Morra, bhoy,’ says Dennis.

“ ‘ Is it any work you would be havin’ for a hard-workin’ boughal ? ’ asked the King.

“ ‘ Ay, work and plenty,’ replied the bogman, ‘ but I don’t pay gomerals to blether with the girls.’

“ ‘ Ay,’ says the King, ‘ but it doesn’t do to be uncivil to the girls these days, Dennis.’

“ ‘ Is it work or women ye’re afther lookin’ for ? ’ says Dennis.

“ ‘ It’s work,’ says the King.

“ So Dennis gave the royal boughal a spade and put him to work. Past where the King was diggin’, Nora O’Connor was creelin’ the dry peat to a stack. She was the prettiest colleen in the whole glen. It was the blue eyes of her and the skin ye could look through, it was that fine and beautiful. No wondther at all at all that the King was struck speechless at the first sight of her. She would thrip so softly over the sod in her white bare feet, singing an ould Irish song.

“ ‘ Ye’ve forgot to be diggin’,’ she said once as she passed.

“ ‘ Oh, ay,’ says the King, ‘ there’s a kink in me power of remembrance since I first laid eyes on ye.’

“ ‘ Ye must have more thoughts than ye know what to do with,’ says she, laughin’.

“ ‘ Ye’re a good guesser for a girl,’ says he.

“ ‘ Maybe ye’d sell me a farthin’s worth of him,’ says she.

“ ‘ I’ll give ye a wheen for nothin’ if ye’ll linger a minute,’ says he.

“ ‘ It’s not mesilf that would be mindin’ at all, but Dennis,’ says Nora, with a knowin’ smile.

“ ‘ Dhrap yer sheep’s eyes on yer work, there ! ’ roared Dennis across the bog ; and Nora thripped off with her creel.

“ At dinner time the King let on that he had nothin’ to eat at all, and of course he told the fair Nora. She shared her dinner with him. In matters of the heart he made hay while the sun of opportunity was shinin’.

“ ‘ Perhaps,’ says he, ‘ a kind-hearted colleen like yourself could tell a poor boughal where to find lodgin’ and food with daacent people ? ’

“ ‘ I’ll ax me father,’ says she.

“ ‘ I’ll go down with ye and hear what he says,’ he answered.

“ And home to the cabin be the side of the woods they went as the shadows began to fall.

“ As they came to the Round Tower they lingered awhile, jist switherin’ and wondtherin’ who built it, and why and for what earthly use. As they stood for a minute, Nora put her beautiful white hand on one of the ould stones a wee bit higher nor her head, and jist as quick as ye could wink yer eye the King took his cap in his hand and clapped it over the hand.

“ ‘ Behave ! ’ says Nora, as she quickly dropped her hand.

“ ‘ A million pardons ! ’ says the King. ‘ I thought it was a butterfly.’

“ ‘ If yer heart’s as fine as yer complimentins, I hope ye’ll get lodgin’ at our cabin,’ she said, as she turned away her head for the blushes.

“ As they went along, the King sort o’ shyly took hold of her hand jist to make sure she wasn’t a fairy.

“ There was quite a palaver in the cabin that night. The old man gloured and the old woman axed questions, and Nora, with her arms akimbo, looked on and hoped.

“ ‘ Who’s yer father ? ’ axed Phelim O’Connor.

“ ‘ Me father’s dead,’ says he, ‘ but he was a man

of an ancient line, one of whom was Durtracta, the disciple of St. Patrick, who built the Abbey of Antrim.'

" 'A terrible *descint* from that to *this* ! ' says Mrs. O'Connor, pointin' to the boughal.

" 'Ay, threue for you, mother,' says he ; ' but it's meself that's goin' to regain lost fortunes, with the help of God.'

" 'He's a wondtherful worker,' sayd Nora—God forgive her !

" 'Purty good testimony, me girl,' says her father, 'if ye wor in the witness-box, which ye don't happen to be at this minute.'

" 'For why should ye pour cold wather on the warm heart of youth ? ' says she, with a toss of her purty head.

" 'Ye were sint out to work in the bogs, me girl—not to gather human mushrooms,' said Mistress O'Connor.

" Well, they paveed and palavered one at a time, and all of them at once, until at last the fracas ended by givin' the boughal his supper and a place in the corner among the peat coom as a bed for the night.

" The King was happy. He dhramed the most beautiful dhrames of purty colleens and fairies and earthly paradises in which Nora moved about as a queen.

" Nixt mornin' Nora and the strange boughal went off again to the bogs, but durin' the day a terrible mishap befell the King.

" 'Me bhoy,' says Dennis, when he caught him throwin' kisses aferher Nora, 'ye'd betther go for a sodger or a king or somethin', for ye couldn't earn pirta peelin's at diggin' turf. Ye do nothin' from mornin' till night but glour at the girls, and all that's to be done in that direction I'm purty well inclined to do meself.'

" So he ordthered the King out of the bog ; but

the King wouldn't budge an inch until ould Dennis hit him a whack with his shillalah. The kind paid him back with more interest than was laygal, and would surely have kilt ould Dennis entirely but for the intherference of Nora.

"That night he waited for the colleen, and they walked home the longest way around. As they went through the woods, hand in hand, talkin' much and sayin' little, they heard a noise—'rat-tap, rat-tap!'

"That's the Leprauchan," says the King.

"We'll ax for three wishes," says Nora, laughin'.

"Is that you, Mister Leprauchan?" shouted the King.

"Yis," says the quare voice of the fairy shoemaker.

"We want our three wishes," says the King.

"Out wid thim," says he, "for I'm gey busy mendin' boots for the fairy ball that's to be given in the Round Tower the night."

"For a minute the young people stood scratching their heads and puzzlin' their minds over wishes. Then the King spoke.

"A King for a husband for this colleen!" says he.

Nora laughed.

"Hurry up!" says the Leprauchan.

"A coach and four white horses for the wedding," says Nora, clappin' her hands in glee.

"And a fairy friend for time of throuble," says the King, and the Leprauchan wint on with his work.

"Why didn't ye ax for somethin' for yourself?" Nora said, as they meandered home.

"Because," says he, "me name's already in his book."

"What did ye ax for?"

"Somethin' he couldn't give to two people!"

"And what may that be?"

"The most beautiful colleen in the world."

"Ah, shure, ye're jist bletherin', for they do be

sayin' that the King himself is thravellin' the world over in search of that same colleen.'

" 'Ay, I've heard that same ; but the Leprauchan says that only the King and meself have the ghost of a chance—and between you and me, I think I'll bate him ! '

### III

" At the O'Connor cabin that night the King was full of blarney. Around the peat fire he told tales of fairyland. He reeled off long poems of love and romance. He sung the songs of Carolin and the bards of long ago. He paveed around the old folks, and told of the wondtherful friends he had at the court of the King. He axed them for Nora, and Nora for herself, and every one of the three of them said, ' Yes.' But the night is the time for switherin', and Mistress O'Connor had worn her thinkin' cap.

" At breakfast she said : ' Look here, me boughal, is it Nora ye would be afther marryin' ? '

" ' Ay,' says he. ' Ye're a good guesser to know nothin'—it is that.'

" ' Well, thin,' says she, ' before we consint ye'll have to have money enough to buy an ass and a cyart and sell yer own thurf in the town of Anthrim.'

" ' It's a bargain,' sayd he.

" Ould Phelim wanted to take a hand in the bargainin', but he was tired and all throughther, and just yawned and stretched himself, and, with his mouth as wide open as a coal-scuttle, said : ' Ochancee-o-ho-him-ho-harry ! If I was a maid I would niver marry.'

" Nixt day the King became bould. He wint off with Nora in the mornin', but instead of goin' to the bogs they wint off to the Antrim Fair, where he bought an ould cuddy and cyart.

" Afther cavortin' around for a while, they got into their cyart, and sittin' purty close tighther they druv home.

" As they passed ould Mulvany's bog, the King stood up, and called over the hedge to Dennis :

" ' Ho, there, Mulvany, ye poltroon ! Come over here till I give ye a taste of me tongue ! '

" Dennis, with clenched fists and glarin' eyes, came and looked at the pair in the cyart. He stood for a minute in silent eloquence. Thin says he : ' Ye decavin' baby thief—ye sacriligious, dundtherheaded haythen ! May the spotted favor split ye in four halves ! '

" ' Put a turf in that torn pocket of a mouth of yours, me bhoy, while I dhrive some sinse through yer copper cranium,' says the King.

" Dennis scowled ; Nora laughed.

" ' Now, ye devil,' says the King, ' how much will ye take for yer bog ? '

" ' Ye uncivilised, playbayian baste ! ' says Mulvany, ' ye haven't enough money to buy a feather out of a sparrow's tail.'

" The King slipped his hand into a secret pocket and took out a warrant signed by the King. He showed it to Dennis. It was for a big sum of money.

" ' Now, Mulvany, ye imp of Satan,' says he, ' go into Antrim and get the Scribes and Pharisees to make out a lagal transfer of your ould bog to me, and I'll hand ye the money ! '

" ' Ye're the broth of a bhoy,' says Dennis.

" ' Ay, and me mither niver sould soup, naither,' says the King, as he hit the ould cuddy on the harness and jogged on towards the home of the O'Connors.

" That night, ould Phelim and his wife, seein' as how the strange boughal had the luck of God in his pocket as well as in his heart, were uncommon kind to him.

“ ‘ Ye would like, maybe, to sit by the fire to-night with the colleen,’ says Phelim.

“ ‘ It’s a mind-reader ye are, Phelim,’ says the King.

“ ‘ We’re goin’ right off to lave ye,’ says Mistress O’Connor.

“ ‘ The sooner the betther,’ says he.

“ The lovers put on extra turf and sat in the chimney corner tellin’ feerie stories and readin’ fortunes in each other’s hands. They looked into each other’s eyes and every one of the two of them confessed that it was like peepin’ into heaven through a slit in the sky, or lookin’ at the world through a stained-glass window. They did that. They played the old-fashioned game of measurin’ each other’s lips, but the noise nearly woke up ould Misthress O’Connor, and they just bethought themselves and behaved quietly.

“ But the fairies heard them, and there was the sound of wings—maybe of angels, who knows? There was the scint of bog-mint and violets and the sweet singin’ of birds that forgot to be sleepin’, and if ould Mulvany had known what was happening he’d surely have forgot to be sleepin’, too.

“ When the boughal tore himself away from Nora, and Nora away from him, there was a moistenin’ of eyes with the dew of the heart, and a tug at the heart-strings that made strange sounds. As they went to sleep, it was Cleena herself, the fairy queen from far-off Munster, who closed their eyelids and held them down fast till they passed through the gates into the land of dhreams! ”

“ As they sat at their stirabout and buttermilk nixt mornin’, the boughal raised his bowl, and, says he,—

“ ‘ *In the essince of shamrocks  
I dhrink to the health  
Of the house of O’Connor !* ’

“ Then he spake of his plans for a journey across Lough Neagh. He would be away some days, but on his return he would bring the most beautiful colleen in the world a message from the King himself. He would that.

“ So with his stick in his hand and his bundle on his back, he started on his journey. Nora wint with him as far as the bridge across the Six-Mile-Water. There, with an ache in her heart, and a quiver on her rose-red lips, she gave him her blessin’ and let him go. As he wint through the wood between the river and the lough, he was singin’, for his heart was light with love, and be the help of the fairies his quare quest had been crowned with success.

“ One mornin’, as Nora was dhrawin’ water from the well, she heard the clatter of horses’ feet. Lookin’ toward the road, she saw four white horses, and behind them a strange kind of carriage, and in the carriage sat the idol of her heart, her boughal, dressed jist as he wint away. On the seat in front sat two warrior-like men in doublet and hose and hats with tall red plumes.

“ ‘ It’s as the Leprauchan said ! God save us alive ! ’ says she, as she ran out to embrace her bhoy.

“ ‘ It’s the King’s own carriage, Mavourneen,’ says he, ‘ and it’s married ye are to be in his castle this day.

“ ‘ And it’s laving us behind ye would be ? ’ says Mistress O’Connor.

“ ‘ Not at all, not at all,’ says the King. ‘ Jump in, mother ! Come on, Phelim, me bhoy ! Step lively, for we’re off to spend the day with royalty, even though we be hung, drawn, and quarthered to-morrow ! ’

" So they clambered into the royal cyart just as they were, without boots or socks or coverin' of any kind for their heads. The boughal and Nora sat side be side and cavorted and capered all the way there. And they dhrove past Mulvany's bog that was.

" ' This bog,' says he, ' is where Phelim O'Connor cuts turf for the King hereafter.'

" Ould Phelim laughed, but Mistress O'Connor looked glum.

" ' It's too uncanny to last, Phelim,' says she ; ' it's dhramin' we are and may God prevint us from wakin' up in Purgatory or jail, or the poorhouse ! '

" When they had been dhrivin' half a day, the King ordhered the men to stop the carriage. He unlocked a wee secret door, and brought out a table and things to ate and dhrink. He laid the table with his own hands—Nora helpin', of course—and it was on the side of the road undther a sacred ash that they ate. He had buttermilk to dhrink the King's health in, but Phelim it was who said, ' For plabayins like us the essince of shamrocks is good enough, me bhoy ; but whin ye dhrink the health of a King, ye should do it with the kind of dhrink that goes down yer throat like a torchlight procession and a brass band.'

" The King shtripped a suspicious-lookin' bottle of its straw jacket and gave Phelim a cup. The ould man smacked his lips and looked wicked in the eyes.

" ' Saints alive ! ' says Phelim, whin he could speake, ' I'm afther breakin' a commandmint ! '

" ' What is it ? '

" ' I'm covetin', agra.'

" ' Covetin' what ? '

" ' A giraffe its long neck, so that I could feel that sup as it flowed for a mile into my interior economy.'

" In the twilight they arrived at the castle gates.

" ' Glory be ! ' says Mistress O'Connor ; ' is it

hung or thransported ye'd be gettin' us this day—to be thresspassin' on the King's domain ?'

" ' Whisht ! ' says Nora, ' it's himself has axed us ! '

" ' It's me heart that's hungerin' for boots,' says Phelim.

" ' Me, too,' says Nora.

" ' Niver mind,' says the husband that was to be. ' If it'll make ye more comfortable I'll take mine off.'

" As a gaily dhressed man came out to meet him, Phelim and his wife dhropped on their knees.

" ' Get up,' says the King. ' That isn't himself—it's the butler.'

" Phelim gave the man a look that would wither the laves on a tree. ' Ye uncivil galoot ! ' says he, ' for why do ye be lettin' a dacint man be makin' a fool of himself ? '

" When the man took them within, the poor craithers slid along on the smooth boards and saft rugs—the feelin' was good to the feet. They touched the purty things in the hall and gloured around in wondthermint.

" ' Phelim, darlin', I think we're bewitched,' says the wife.

" ' I'm thinkin' we're blinked,' says he.

" Nora was handed over to half a dozen ladies. They took her to a bath and thin to a wardrobe, and thin—of coorse—to a lookin'-glass.

" ' It's jist sleepin' I am,' says she, ' for there's a crown on me head, and you've dhressed me up as a queen ! '

" ' Is there anything yer heart could wish ? ' says one.

" ' Oh, ay, deed there is now. Let me mother come here as soon as the laws of commotion will let her.'

" Thin in came her boughal, and he was royally robed, with a crown on his head !

" ' It's foolin' the world ye are ! ' says Nora.

" It was himself that laughed as he took her in his

arms and 'let out the secret that he wasn't a boughal at all, but jist lettin' on. And they laughed as they held on to each other, and the crowns did topple here and there in an ungracious and unbocomin' way on their heads—and they throd on the tails of each other's clothes and slithered and slid till the Dowager Duchess O'Connor came in with her nose in the air like a paycock.

“ ‘Yer kingdoms are fallin’ off yer heads,’ says she, as she fixed the crowns shtraight.

“ ‘How did *you* find out?’ says the King

“ ‘I took the colleen that washed me feet,’ says she, ‘and put her in a corner with me fist to her nose till she towld me who ye were, and savin’ yer prisince I didn’t have to detain her long !’

“ ‘Where’s me father?’ says Nora.

“ ‘Lost in the shuffle,’ says the Dowager Duchess. ‘I haven’t laid eyes on him since he was on his marrow-bones before the butler.’

“ Poor Phelim at this time was jist meanderin’ around like a lost child. Nora sent her mother to look for him.

“ ‘O’Connor,’ says she, whin she found him, ‘ how would I look on a load of turf with yoursilf as dhriver now ?’

“ ‘I remimber how ye did look whin I took *ye* from yer father’s bog.’

“ ‘Dhry up !’ says she, ‘ and put on a few manners, even if they ill become ye.’

“ Jist then a man took Phelim away and overhauled him. Later, when he appeared like a corpse dhressed for the funeral, the guests gathered for the weddin’. There were lords and ladies, jooks and jookesses. There were cyart-loads of flowers and prisints galore. Jist as the archbishop was puttin’ his robes on, Nora took the King aside to a quiet place and told him of a fear in her heart.

“ ‘ Oh, Misther King,’ says she, ‘ the wee people of the glen do say that Kings do sometimes git tired of their Queens. I’ve been out in yer garden, and undther a yew-tree I did hear a green linnet singin’, and the song he sung was this :—

“ ‘ *Ye’re sailin’ in unknown seas, colleen,*  
*And the rocks are many ahead ;*  
*Ye need some help at the hilm, colleen,*  
*To clear yer heart of its dread.*

“ ‘ So I did ax for a pilot, and the linnet was a fairy prince, and told me what to do.’

“ ‘ And what did he tell ye to do, me queen ? ’ says the King kindly.

“ ‘ I am to ax ye for a marriage contrhact, and in it ye are to promise that if iver ye get tired of Nora O’Connor, ye will give her whatsoiver she desires that three asses can dhraw away.’ ”

Here the story ended for the night. Jamie was nodding. Withero was getting fidgety ; the candle had burned low in the sconce and the fire needed Jamie’s reluctant attention.

“ Did his nibs sign up, Anna ? ” asked Withero.

“ Come in to-morra night, Willie, and find out,” she answered.

## CHAPTER IV

### A KING'S HONOUR AND A QUEEN'S WIT

I

NEXT night we were gathered around the fire again. Withero was in his place. The kettle was on the chain, but we were warned that no hints would disturb it until the story had been finished.

"That's for me, I suppose," said the stone-breaker ; "but if the Tower of Siloam falls I won't be the only culprit in need of a pine suit."

"The King had the conthtract made jist as Nora wanted it," Anna proceeded. "The ceremony took place, and thin the guests wint away. Ould Phelim and his wife were dhriven back home. Mistress O'Connor, of coarse, took home her new finery and wore it on market days. It was as good as a show to see her—and admission was free. It took her some time to git used to it. Phelim said the new things hurt him, so he wore the things that didn't. At first he couldn't stand the high-falutin' lingo of his wife. 'Ivery time she opens her mouth,' he said, 'she puts her foot in it, and bedad ! the worst of it is that I want to stick mine in too !' Vanity is short lived and dies hard, but time helps out a good dale. In time her nose came down out of the air, and Phelim was more contint.

"Queen Nora grew in sinse and good judgment. She didn't forgit the bogs nor the bog people. She was loved and honoured be high and low. Two party childther came, one afther another, and whilc her husband ruled Ulster, she ruled her household—but it's recorded that while she had wisdom enough and

a little to spare, her husband hadn't quite enough. 'When there's any wisdom around people soon find it out, for whether we live on pirtas and buttermilk or on fine bread and nightingales' tongues, we need wisdom, and wisdom is the mother of judgment, and that's what a King man needs.'

"The King got in the habit of axin' Nora for her advice in matters of state. So did the King's counsellors. So did all sorts of folks with all sorts of troubles. None of them axed in vain. She wasn't consated about it, nayther. Whin great men were lookin' for wives, the King always told them to go to the bogs, 'for there,' says he, 'is where the Queen came from, and there isn't anything jist as nice on the face of the earth as she is !' Which reminds me of the verse :—

*"Oh, Willie, honey, but love is bonny  
A wee while, and when it's new ;  
But when it's old, oh ! it grows quite cold,  
And it fades away like the mornin' dew !*

"As the years went by, the Queen seemed to get more wisdom, and the King more and more depinded upon her. Thin love became more and more common, and as it did he axed her less and less. Sometimes he got a bit jealous, and at times angry, just because in matters requirin' wisdom she was Queen and King too.

"One day a test of judgment came along. An ould man had a foal. In the same field there was an ould garron. Quare enough, the foal took an uncommon likin' to him that wasn't its mother. The foal grazed with him, played with him, stayed with him. Every day it was the same. If it was bate away it came right back. This looked quare to everybody in ginal, and to the man who owned the garron in particular. It gave him a quare notion.

"The owner of the garron claimed the foal.

“ ‘ For why do ye claim the foal of me mare ? ’ says the mare’s owner, ‘ and more betoken . . . ’

“ ‘ What a fool ye must be to think that a horse which is a garron could ayther be father or mother to a foal ! ’

“ ‘ The foal stays with the garron,’ says he.

“ ‘ The moon stays in the heavens,’ says the other, ‘ but that dizint prove that it’s made of green cheese.’

“ But the man who owned the garron stuck to the foal, and the man who owned the mare took the matther to the judge, and from the judge to the King. The King was puzzled, but he didn’t like to ax the Queen. So he said : ‘ Be the instinct of the foal,’ says he, ‘ we will decide the owner. Put the mare at one end of the field, and the garron at the other, and to whomsoiniver the foal goes, will be the owner be orther of the King.’

“ The Queen had come in, unbeknownst to the King, and had heard the contintion. Whin the men wint out, she laughed like a girl, and says she : ‘ Your Majesty,’ says she, ‘ the most ignorant peasant in Ulster is wise enough to know that a garron can be nayther father nor mother to a foal. It’s not be the instinct of a silly foal, but be the instinct of raison and justice that the case must be decided.’

“ ‘ I forbid ye to meddle in State affairs,’ says he. ‘ There’s only one authority here—and I’m him.’

“ ‘ To have little yerself is bad,’ says she, ‘ but to think that because ye haven’t, nobody else has, is worse.’

“ The King left the hall, in pure madness, sayin’ as he wint, ‘ If ye iver interfere in my judgmint again, I’ll sind ye back to the bogs from whence ye came ! ’

“ ‘ Well, dear,’ was her partin’, ‘ it’s better to be a small frog in a big puddle than a big frog in a wee puddle, in which he has to stand on his head to get a dhrink ! ’

“ Nixt day, the mis-trial of bad sinse came off. The mare and the garron were put at different ends of the field, and the wee foal was placed in the middle. In the time it takes to wink yer eye the foal galloped over to the ould garron and be the foolish act became the property of the garron’s owner. The King was there, and well pleased with himself—so was the foal’s owner.

“ ‘ If that gomeral wasn’t the King,’ said the owner of the mare, ‘ he’d be a hearse dhriver or an undther-shtudy to a lamplighter.’

“ One day the Queen was out walking with her childther. As they wint along the road a man came along. As he came close to the Queen, he took his cap off his head, and, holdin’ it in one hand, he scratched his head with the other.

“ ‘ I’m the man who owns the mare, Your Majesty,’ says he. ‘ May I ax ye a question?’

“ The Queen smiled, and said, ‘ Yes.’

“ ‘ What would Yer Majesty do if ye were in my place?’

“ ‘ I would consult the fairies,’ says she.

“ ‘ For why didn’t yer husband do that same, God save us alive?’

“ The Queen laughed, and the man laughed too.

“ ‘ Listen, good man,’ says she. ‘ Go down by the river to-morrow, take a fishin’ rod, and when ye see the King comin’ do ye turn around and be fishin’ on dhry land.’

“ She towld him what the King was likely to say, and what he should answer back. The man wint away well pleased with what he thought might be an alley out of the main street of his throuble.

“ Nixt day, as the King went down along the river bank to fish, he saw a man fishin’ on the dhry land.

“ ‘ Why do ye be fishin’ on the dhry land?’ he axed the man. ‘ Don’t ye know it’s foolish?’

“ ‘ It’s no more foolish, Yer Majesty, than to believe that an ould garron can ayther be father or mother to a foal ! ’

“ The King had the man put in irons for tellin’ the truth, and himself it was that wint home in a towerin’ tanthrum.

“ ‘ Tell the Queen,’ says he to one of his ginerals, ‘ to pack up her thraps and go back home to the bogs. I know that polthroon got his wisdom from her, and it’s undignified to have any woman dictatin’ to a King. That’s me ordther—go and execute it, and ax me no questions ! ’

## II

“ The word that the Queen was goin’ spread like the maisles. The household was in tears. The ginerals hung their heads. The King hid himself, and well he might, the shtoakawn.

“ To the gineral who was to execute the order the Queen showed the marriage contract, and axed him if he would be so kind as to execute that too.

“ ‘ I don’t know, Yer Majesty.’

“ ‘ In that case ye’ll be quite at home here,’ says the Queen.

“ ‘ I mean——’

“ ‘ It’s meself knows what ye mean—there’s no call for palaver.’

“ ‘ What would Yer Majesty like put in the cyarts ? ’ he asked.

“ The Queen swithered for a minute. ‘ Deed,’ says she, ‘ that taxes me own wisdom. I must swither over it.’

“ She wint into the garden, and, sittin’ be the big, yew-tree, she heard the linnet sing.

“ ‘ Oh, Prince of Fairyland,’ she said, ‘ oh, greatest

comforter in *Tir Nan Og*, do give me wisdom in this hour of sore trouble.'

" 'Ye've been unmindful of your fairy friends,' says the linnet, 'and now when in throuble you must have a test put to yer faith. Ye'll be given wisdom be the minit. Aych minit will bear on its back its own burden. Ye must live a minit at a time !'

" The Queen came out of the garden and began to pass through her sore thrial—a minute at a time.

" 'I'll be afther loadin' the cyarts, Gineral,' she said.

" The first cyart came to the door, and packin' began. Four dogs, three cats, a pet lamb, a parrot, a pet rabbit, and a canary. The second cyart came and was filled with toys, books, pictures, clothes, and the two childther.

" 'Yer Majesty wouldn't be afther takin' away the heir to the throne ?' says the Gineral.

" 'Ay, Sir Knight,' says she. ' Her Majesty may carry off the throne itself if she's given wisdom and strength.'

" 'Saints in glory !' says he, ' what would ye do with the throne ?'

" 'Sit on it in the bogs,' says she, ' and write sonnets to the moon.'

" 'Wouldn't that be a quare place for a throne, now ?'

" 'Gineral,' says the Queen, ' whatsoiniver a queen sits down on is a throne—whether it's a stool or mossy bank or a gilded box of a chair that niver sees the daylight.'

" The Queen jist palavered with the Gineral while she was waiting for the nixt minute's wisdom. It seemed a year in comin'. Whin it arrived she knowed what to do, she did that.

" 'Go ax His Majesty to pray God for enough of the instinct of an Irish gentleman to come down here and say good-bye to his wife and wains. Tell

him his wife has only love in her heart—jist mixed with a bit of throuble, of course—but that if he'll jist be a lover once again for five minutes and a father for one, he can believe not alone that a garron can be a mother to a foal but that he can be mother to the King himself, or of a white elephant or a black crow. If he'll jist come and kiss us all as once he did in the long ago, he can believe if he likes that a banty hen can lay swan's eggs, and out of them hatch a flock of nice big whales. He can that. One word more, Gineral. If ye plaze, don't let a human soul be in sight if he comes to say good-bye—it's undignified for a King to let his lip thrimble or to have a dhrop of heart-dew on his eyelash. A wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse—ye understand?'

"The Gineral wint to find the King; and the Queen wint to spake comfort to the childther, who were whimperin' in the cyart. A dhriver had been provided for aych cyart. She sint two of them off with the first two cyarts.

"' Go on down the road,' says she, ' and keep dhrivin' till I overtake ye.'

The dhriver of her own cyart she sent away, and in the courtyard she stood beside her cyart. As she stood she prayed for superhuman strength for what her mind was set on. She knewed what to do, and aych minute brought more power. She was dhressed as a colleen of the bogs again, and niver in all her life had she looked so purty, so pure, so queenly.

"Down came the King.

"He was thryin' mighty hard to look unconcerned, but sure enough there was a thrimble of the lip and gawky awkwardniss that towld Nora how the land was lyin'.

"' Is the word of a gintleman good, bad, or indifferent? ' says she.

"' It's good,' says he.

“ ‘ I can have what I can take away in three cyarts ? ’

“ ‘ Ye can. ’

“ She breathed a prayer, gathered all her strength, and, grippin’ the King by the two legs, she dumped him into the cyart, and, as quick as lightnin’, jumped in on top of him, gathered up the reins, hit the ass on the behind end, and off she wint.

“ ‘ Hould on ! ’ says the King.

“ ‘ Hould on nothin’, ’ says she. ‘ I’ve got me flittin’ and I’m off home to the bogs. ’ ”

“ What did the gomeral do ? ” asked Withero.

“ Well, Willie, he came to his sinses. The load on his stomach sort o’ made him think—men bewhiles do think whin pressure is on them. ”

“ Ay, with that kind o’ pressure any man would think. ”

“ Well, ” she continued, “ just like a woman whin her hat isn’t on shtraight, he says : ‘ Is anybody lookin’ ? ’ says he.

“ ‘ No, ’ says Nora.

“ ‘ Let me up, ’ says he.

“ ‘ Are ye mine ? ’ says she.

“ ‘ Yis, ’ says he, ‘ but ye’ve broken the contract. ’

“ ‘ How’s that ? ’ says Nora.

“ ‘ Ye’ve taken four asses instead of three. ’

“ ‘ Oh, no, dear, ye’re mistaken—it’s only three asses : the other is an Ulster mule. ’ ”

The kettle came off the chain and we had the usual cup of tea all round. As we went off to bed we left Withero and Jamie in a heated discussion with Anna on the comparative amount of gumption in the possession of men and women.

## CHAPTER V

### A CORNER IN LARKS

#### I

MICHAEL was the niggard of our gang. From long experience we had learned to quicken our sensibilities when negotiating a trade or dicker with him. He had a soft, naïve way of extending courtesies with invisible strings attached. Only one man in the glens of Antrim had ever gotten the better of a bargain with him. From this Shylock of Ballymena, Michael once purchased a parrot. The bird talked on the 12th of November—Fair Day—but for some unknown reason never spoke again. Michael made the journey to Ballymena and protested vigorously.

“ Michael, me bhoy,” said the birdseller, as he tapped Michael’s low brow in a familiar and friendly manner, “ I know’d when I sold Poll that he had a kink in his power of rememberin’ words, but me broth of a bhoy, I also know’d piradventure without a moiety of a doubt that he was what no other man, woman, or chile was, or ever has been in yer measly wee town ov Antrim.”

“ An’ what might that be ? ” asked Michael.

“ A devil ov a thinker, me bhoy ! ”

Antrim paid dearly for that Ballymena parrot. The story of the larks is only one item in the account.

We had just emerged out of the old swimming hole in the mill race one day, when Michael said in a casual kind of way :—

“ Yer oul’ man’s fond o’ larks, isn’t he ? ”

“ Ay,” I replied, with chattering teeth, “ how did you know ? ”

“ I guessed,” said Michael.

“ Yer a purty good guesser to know nothin’,” said I.

“ I know more’n yer think fur.”

“ Wud ye let on t’ me ? ”

“ I know where there’s a nest of larks.”

“ Honest ? ”

“ Ay.”

“ How much for the whole nest ? ” I asked.

“ I have half a dozen people figurin’ on them, but since I know ye’re purty anxious, I’ll make a special price ! ”

“ Before ye drap down in price too suddenly, Michael—I—I—want to say”—I could see a sneer curl on Michael’s big lips—“ I jist want to say,” says I, “ that th’ oul’ man isn’t so keen on larks this sayson ! ”

“ No ? ” said Michael, as he sniffed the air in cold disdain.

“ No,” said I demurely, “ a good cock thrush would jist about hit ‘im right.”

Michael surveyed me with a look of withering scorn as he drawled out sarcastically—“ Maybe a nice singing cuckoo would about shuit his paltry mind ! ”

Of course I wanted the larks. I wanted them as desperately as Michael wanted to sell them. It was a question of cost. Could I muster the price ? Could I shave his demands down to my meagre resources ?

“ Come on ! ” I said abruptly, and as seriously as I could, “ let’s get down to business. What’s th’ lowest price ye’ll take fur them larks ? ”

“ Now, seeing it’s you,” he began.

“ Never mind s-e-e-i-n-g i-t-s m-e ! seeing it’s the larks, how much are they worth ? ” I insisted.

“ What they’re worth, an’ what I’m axin’,” said he, “ as as much conniction as Ayster an’ Christmas, but if ye’ll kape yer oul’ shirt on awhile, I’ll give ye the surprise ov yer life—I will that ! ”

"Ye'll be selling them below cost, I'll bate, eh, Michael?"

"Worse, me bhoy, worse nor that. I'll be making ye a prisint ov thim, charging ye but fourpence for th' time I've wasted an' th' moral shtrain on me narvous system."

"It's dhirt chape, Michael," says I, "but I'm sore consarned about yer narves. Antrim could poorly afford t' lose sich a lark merchant!" Michael explained that in business he was a dual personality—one of him always underchanging, and the other the reverse. Some sort of compromise must have been struck, for Michael is now an old man—wealthy, and showing no sign whatever of the terrible strain of those earlier years.

I inquired about terms, whether a penny a week would be acceptable? I offered a mortgage on several bird cages, and was willing to bind myself by any number or style of oaths necessary to fit the case. Michael was obdurate. "That's jist blether," he said. "Money talks!"

"Michael," says I, "it's a bargain! Whin can I take them?"

"Whin can ye be afther paying something?"

"Jist as soon as I'm afther finding out they're not sparrows."

"I don't think ye've got sinse enough," said Michael, "to tell the difference betwixt a paycock and a cock robin!"

"Come on, now, ye haythin baste," said I, "be daacent, and if ye can't be daacent, be as daacent as ye can, and tell me when I can get thim." Michael folded his arms and looked at me with an air of pity. I felt as if he could see down into the depths of my empty pockets.

"There is, at least, a baker's dozen o' people that wants them larks," he said slowly, "an' I think I'll

close up wid one ov them ; " and with that he walked off and left me.

That night I went over the matter with my father. He knew Michael better than I did, and advised me accordingly. " Don't pay a ha'penny down till ye see th' birds," he said.

## II

Next morning I was about early and watching for Michael. No devotee ever hung around the shrine of a saint with more enthusiasm—nor did Jacob possess more intense desire when he took a fall out of the Angel, than I possessed that morning at the mouth of the alley as I awaited the appearance of the lark man. Finally he emerged—I followed a furlong or two behind. Then accidentally I overtook him. He was headed for Gowdy's meadow.

" Where are ye fur ? " he asked, as I pretended to pass him.

" Jist fur a dandther ! " I replied.

" I'm off fur a look at the larks," he ventured, in a casual way. " Wud ye like t' g'long ? " I told him I was rather busy, but I thought I could spare the time. We turned down Mill Row and went along the bank of the river, past the paper mill to Gowdy's meadow. As we went along, he endeavoured to impress me that he possessed unerring judgment in larks. His talk was wondrously wise—full of big words and veiled allusions.

" Ye could make a fortune by selling sich wonderful wisdom ! " said I. " Oh, that's thru'e," he answered, " but I always throw it around free t' dunces ! "

As we neared the gap, I heard the well-known notes of a male lark. He was about fifty feet high. I stood in the lane. The lark was rising higher and higher.

He was pouring out melody as if his heart would burst.

"That's him!" Michael said, as he stood admiring what he considered his private property.

Michael had a large face, he was square-jawed, with a low brow, large nose, and a mouth that looked like an open oyster.

Ordinarily, that face looked about as spiritual as a rasher of bacon, but that morning in the lane it looked positively beautiful. There was a rapture on it as he looked at the lark, that shamed me into silence and put him in supreme command of the situation. Higher and higher rose the songster, and with him went Michael's stock! Fainter and fainter became the song, smaller and smaller became the rival of the nightingale, until he was a mere speck in the azure blue. Michael became poetic. He talked as if he were murmuring in a dream. As I watched and listened, conflicting emotions surged through me. I was under a spell. I was enraptured to the point of prayer or tears, and I was conscience-stricken that I had ever suspected Michael of "a corner" in larks! I determined to atone for my sin. With upturned face I groped for his hand, and with it in mine we walked through a gap into the meadow.

"Ye'll see th' oul' hen if ye kape yer eyes open," he said.

We seated ourselves closely together on a primrose bank. We sat there for about ten minutes.

The "Oul' Man," as Michael called him, was still coruscating among the clouds—the river was at the other end of the meadow. We saw a kingfisher skim its surface, like a ball of fire; a wren twittered in a sloe bush nearby; the air was laden with a perfume of flowers, and we basked in the sunshine—"Knee deep in June."

The mother bird arrived. We watched her, with

bated breath. She fluttered over our heads—she balanced herself about twenty feet from the ground, then darted over the river, balancing herself over an imaginary destination. Four times she performed the same illusory act in order to deceive us. Finally she alighted. Michael, of course, knew the spot, but was merely adding a little romance and poetry to the commercialism of the bargain. We went to the spot and found her front entrance—a flattened surface of a few inches wide, and from it a little arched Addison's Walk, that led to the nest, containing four well-flushed youngsters. We interrupted one of their many morning meals and the lady of the house screamed with indignation and excitedly cut capers over our heads. As if he had been shot out of a catapult, down came the father and joined in the rumpus. We hurried away from the scene—content.

That night, as I flew barefooted from house to house, with the evening papers, my footfall was light, my speech subdued, and I moved as if in a dream. Wherever I went, whatever I did, I could hear that song ! As my body flitted in and out of the streets and alleys, my mind was in Gowdy's meadow !

I had earned the money for the larks. My father gave his consent, but as I climbed the ladder to my little pallet in the loft, he said : "Keep yer eye on Michael !" I brushed aside the suggestion as an evil thought. If I could have canonised Michael that night, I would have put him in the saints' calendar instanter ! In the darkness I lay and cogitated on the sex probabilities of the larks. Two cocks and two hens was the average, of course, but suppose there were three cocks ? One was all we could support. To whom should I present the other two ? Then, of a nest of four, two usually died. Of course, in this case, the hens being the weaker sex, would die. All these things I pondered over in my sleepless mind.

At no time in my musing, however, was the picture so dark or my luck so low as to dim my vision of a singing lark in Pogue's Entry. I pictured him cavorting around the little circular green spot in the cage and singing as his father sung that memorable morning. There had been no songster in our entry since the death of my father's old thrush—now we were on the eve of a renaissance, and my name was to be associated with the new order of things.

When the town clock struck the hour of midnight, I had everything arranged. I knew how everything would turn out—down to the most minute detail—I was happy—supremely happy !

I was awakened next morning at dawn by the cries of the fishermen as they drove through Antrim with their cart-loads of herring. Then I heard Barney Hugh's bread carts come lumbering down the street on their way to Ballymena.

In about three moves I was dressed and out. It was a beautiful morning. Con Mulholland, the night watchman, was just coming home with his gun on his shoulder. Old Billy O'Hare, the chimney sweep, went past on a dog-trot, like a little locomotive : puffs of tobacco smoke lingering in his track for a moment before dissolving in the still morning air.

Michael was a jack of all trades and master of one—manure monger—in a home-made cart he made a daily round of the streets, picking up manure for which he got a shilling a load. He called that his “aisy money.”

I arose with the intention of helping him that morning, just to show my appreciation of his magnanimity. From the entrance to Pogue's Entry I could see south past the church, to Barney McQuillan's. To the north I could see past the town well, to Isaac George's at the townend. Michael was not within range of my vision. The condition of the street told

me plainly that he had not worked at his vocation that morning. I went to his house. No one seemed to be up. I whistled. There was no response. I went around to the back of the house—I saw the dung cart—that reassured me.

After waiting about five minutes, I grew a little impatient and whistled "The Boyne Water" with an assurance based on experience that if any of Michael's family were awake they would answer with a brickbat! Across the street a window was raised and Andy Lorrimer poked his head out.

"Is that whistle for sale?" he asked in a wheezy voice—I moved away ashamed—Andy was in the last stages of consumption. In the absence of Michael I needed a bivalve to let off some of my pent-up emotion. I seized a couple of buckets and went to the town well for the family supply of water. Then I took the old heather besom and swept the mud floor. I was just putting the finishing touches to this work of supererogation when I heard a low whistle. I dropped the besom and joined Michael.

"Egad, I'm in throuble!" he said.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"M' oul' maan wants me t' go scollopin' with 'im, an' if I can give 'im fourpence I can go fur th' larks instead."

I fished out the price of the larks and handed it over.

"I'll meet you in Gowdy's meadow at two," I said.

"No," he replied, "not in the meadow, meet me at the racc, an' we'll haave a swim first—bring a good shivering bite."

I announced in a rather important and self-conscious manner to my father that the larks were bought and paid for. I promised to have them home at three. He laughed.

"What 'er laughin' at?" I asked.

"Oh, nawthin'," he said, as he winked at my

mother. I pulled out of the junk heap an old bird cage—former home of the deceased cock thrush. I wiped it over with a dish-cloth and took it to Jamie Esler's. Jamie was finishing a coffin, but promised to add the larks' run in a day or two. The vision grew brighter and brighter every hour. Here was glory for Pogue's Entry, and the total cost was just sevenpence. After transacting business with the carpenter I went down to Sam Johnston's bakery—Miss Elizabeth was at the counter—I had "an account" there, and secured the shivering bite—half a bap and treacle. I stuffed the precious morsel into an inside pocket, and sighed for two o'clock! Time dragged on. At one o'clock I was on my way to the meadow. For the first time in my life, I deliberately threw away several chances to shoot marbles. I had a handful in my pocket, but I couldn't think of anything but larks. Pretty soon I arrived in the land of promise in *ne plus ultra* state of mind. Perhaps *Gloria in Excelsis* would better express the mood. The appointment was to take place at the old swimming hole in the race, but as I passed the meadow, I thought there would be no betrayal of confidence in having a peep. Why shouldn't I? They were mine. As I reached the gap I saw a neighbour of mine—Johnny Adair—meandering around inside.

"Morrow, Johnny," says I.

"Morrow, bhoy," he answered, with a downcast, cadaverous look on his thin face.

"Going for a swim?" I ventured.

"After a while," he replied, without looking at me. I determined to look at the larks anyway. I remembered the orientation: a straight line between the gap and a bare patch of sand on the opposite bank of the river—a tall ragweed bisected the line, and stood at the entrance to the nest.

"I'm going to take a danther over to the river,"

I said, as I balanced myself for a straight dive for the nest.

"I'll stay," said Johnny. I looked back. He was watching me. I went on. I scented danger in the presence of Johnny.

"Perhaps," thought I, "it would be just as well to take them with me." I changed my mind—changed it several times before I reached the nest. I wasn't a foot out of my direction. The larks were gone—nest and all. For a moment I stood rooted to the spot—transfixed. A moment later my mind was at ease—Michael had taken them over to the old swimming hole! He would be there when I arrived. I was sure of that—as sure as mortal ever is of anything. I went on to the river. Behind a clump of blackberry vines sat Bob Doherty, bare-footed, splashing his feet in the river.

"Morrow, Bob," I said cheerfully.

"Morrow," he growled.

"Comin' over t' haave a dip?" I asked.

"Divil a dip," was the curt reply. Bob asked half a dozen questions in a breath—the last of which was the inquiry as to the whereabouts of Michael.

"No," I said, "I haaven't seen him, but I'm t' meet him at the race."

"I'll bate ye a halfpenny he won't be there!" he said.

"I haaven't a halfpenny, Bob, but I'll bate ye half a bap an' treacle, he will!" Bob spat on his halfpenny, and slapped it into my open palm as the manner of men is when they bind a bargain. I gave him a look at my collateral, and sat down beside him. We sat splashing in the water for a few minutes in silence. Bob stooped and picked from the bed of the river a section of the glacial period.

"See that stone?" he asked.

"Ay!"

"D'ye know what I'd like to do with it?"

"No."

"Jap th' brains out of that scallion-faced, flat-nosed, grave robber!"

"Michael?"

"Ay, Michael."

"Sure ye'd be hung," says I.

"It 'ud be a luxury!" he answered, and followed the statement with a string of hair-raising and blasphemous expletives. Then he reported a catalogue of crimes committed, not only by Michael, but by his father, his grandfather, and his brother Bill.

A suspicion arose in my mind. I proposed that we go to the swimming hole. He agreed. As we went towards the race we noticed another well-known figure circumnavigating the ragweed. Bob's hate gave way to laughter. It was my turn to look care-worn and anxious. Heedless of Bob's explosion, I joined Henry Kelly near the ragweed. Bob followed closely behind.

"Ye're lukin' fur something?" I asked.

"Ay," Harry said. "I'm lukin' fur a gully knife I lost th' other day."

"Was it flushed?" Bob asked sarcastically.

"What 'er ye blethering about?" Harry asked innocently. Bob and I smiled at each other, and all three of us moved towards the race. When we reached the gap, Adair was still there.

"Here's the hardest worked man in th' town," Bob said, "studyin' nature."

"Ay," Johnny said. "Human nayture."

Suspicion increased in me, but my faith was equal to the strain. Michael's quondam friends were looking at the world through a nest of larks, and it looked black. They were dour and uncommunicative. We moved out of the gap and turned to the right towards the race. As we did, Tommy Wilson cam' along. We waited for him.

"Hallo, Tommy!" I hailed. "Going for a plunge?"  
"Ay," he said; "but I'm going into the meadow for a minute."

"Did you lose a gully knife?" Bob asked.

"No; but I lost an oul' purse here th' other day."

We stood in the lane and watched Tommy as he rounded the big ragweed in search of the nest. He took his cap off and scratched his head—we laughed outright. He heard us, and came slowly towards the lane with his hands in his pockets. Later, when he overtook us, he manifested a belligerent spirit. He suspected a conspiracy. We were all more or less of the same mind, but no one openly expressed it. We laughed, and exchanged innuendoes, but every one ridiculed the idea that he was looking for larks.

Two minutes after we arrived at the swimming hole four of us were floundering around in the hole. Bob sat on the bank awaiting the result of the wager. Michael failed to appear. My half bap and treacle went the way of my hard-earned fourpence. Bob did condescend to hold the bap to my mouth while I took a mouthful. The others soon got into the secret and each took a bite. We compared notes and pooled our envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. We had been buncoed. There was no doubt of that. We invoked the aid of all the angels in heaven and all the devils in the other place to help us to get even with Michael. The price of the larks, we discovered, ranged from fourpence to a shilling. All had paid in advance, and faith was the essence of each contract. Schemes of revenge ranged from excommunication to tar and feathers. Each of us, one after another, offered to fight Michael, but neither as a remedy nor as revenge did that method appeal to us. He had a hide like a buffalo, and for a sixpenny consideration would volunteer to be thrashed every day in the week.

## III

Fate threw us together a few days later. He had discreetly kept out of our way, but when Ned McCahe butchered John Coulon's pig Michael was on hand to enjoy the entertainment. A " killing " was always an event in our community. On the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, the Protestants had their innings. On St. Patrick's Day, the Romans had theirs. Each creedal clan occupied the field to the exclusion of all others, but at a " killing " we mixed as naturally as stirabout and buttermilk, and occupied reserved seats together, irrespective of race, creed, colour, or previous condition of servitude.

There was an unusual crowd and good seats were at a premium. Ned was in the pig's sanctum sanctorum putting the snapper on the pig's snout, and as the first scream rent the air everybody scrambled for a seat, or standing room to view the performance. In looking hurriedly around, I saw Michael perched on the stone wall that overlooked the piggery. He beckoned me to a seat beside him on the wall. I looked around for the men of Gowdy's meadow—not one of them seemed to be present. I climbed to Michael's side and greeted him in words not lawful to utter. Out came the pig, squealing, at the end of a rope. The crowd squeezed in around the sty. It was the crucial moment. Ned handed the rope to an assistant, took the big hatchet, swung it in the air with his powerful arms—thud ! The rest was a kettle of boiling water and a scraper. A few lingered to see the details, but the majority dispersed.

As Michael and I got down from our seats on the wall, a husky young fellow by the name of McCagre accosted Michael. " Well," says he, " ye dilapidated hearse-driver, where's them larks ? " Just then

Johnny Adair hove in sight. "Go on, Mac," said he, "even the score for the rest ov us!"

Off went McCague's coat and up went his shirt sleeves. Michael stood as undisturbed as a Sioux Indian. A crowd gathered. Epithets, expletives, and threats flew thick and fast. With a vicious clout to the jaw McCague spun Michael around like a top. The lark merchant was aroused. He hit Mac somewhere in the region of the solar plexus and doubled him up like a jack-knife. It was Adair's turn. Off went his coat and in he sailed. With one blow he closed one of Michael's eyes and with another he made the red fluid squirt in all directions out of Michael's big nose.

"Get a kettle of boilin' wather an' scrape 'im!" some one shouted. "All I want is m'sixpence worth!" said Adair, as he battered away at a terrific pace. Michael had neither time to waste nor breath to spare, but he managed to blurt out: "All this—fur  
a—lousy—nest—of—" He never finished the sentence; Adair did. He connected with Michael's organs of speech at that particular moment and a guttural sound akin to that which Ned McCabe produced when he gave the pig its quietus was the result. As the crowd saw Michael's legs give way, a reaction set in. Even those of us more intimately interested hoped he would rally and render a good account of himself, but he didn't and couldn't. When hope died within him he dropped on his knees to escape punishment. At this juncture a fair-haired girl of seventeen appeared on the scene. I must not give her name, for she is now the mother of a large family and a social leader in the community. "Here," she said, as she handed Michael the nest of larks, "take them and give them back where they belong!" Michael could not see whether they were larks or cuckoos, but he held out his hands

and took them. That instantly changed the base of activity.

"Here now," said Michael, "ye pack of dirty bloodhounds, take thim an' cut thim into bits an' divide thim!"

Adair took them. He had worked the hardest for them, but the rest of us closed in on him and each of us proposed a method of adjustment. One proposed to auction them, another to raffle them, and a third suggested that we draw lots. While we haggled over the adjustment the girl handed Michael her apron and he wiped the blood from his face and awaited developments. For the moment we forgot all about Michael. We finally resolved that as there was no hope of any refund, rebate, or return of the money, we would draw lots. Six of us had paid money, so we got six straws. We decided that the man who drew the shortest straw should get the larks. Three purchasers were absent. It was decided to draw for them.

"Come on," she said, "give the poor devil a chance! Haven't ye bate him yer money's worth—give him a straw, too!"

We looked at each other, then at the mutilated culprit, then at the girl. "All right!" said the recuperated McCague. "It's only one chance in seven; give it t' th' brute," and a seventh straw was added.

The girl in the case held the straws. McCague drew first, then Adair tried his luck. I drew for the absentees.

"This," said the girl, as she held up the last straw, "is Michael's."

We measured the straws.

"I'll be hung, dhrawn, an' quartered!" said McCague, "if Michael hasn't got the larks."

"It's the judgment of God," Michael said, as he

crossed himself. We considered it the judgment of a different kind of deity, but we moved away in disgust and chagrin !

It was mooted that there were others who should have participated in the drawing, but I had it from Michael, on the quiet, that there was only one other, "an' he," said the lark man, "is too much of a gentleman to make a rumpus over nawthin'." I threatened to find him, and Michael gave me one of the larks to keep me quiet. He thought it was a hen, but it turned out to be a cock, and for some years enlivened Pogue's Entry with song.

Nearly thirty years later I was having a cup of tea with Sonny Johnston in Philadelphia. We were talking over old times in Antrim. "The last time I saw you," Sonny said, "was in Gowdy's meadow."

"What was I doing?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied ; "but I sat on one of the top branches of a chestnut-tree waiting for—"

"Waiting for Michael!" I interrupted.

"Ay," he said ; "I paid him fur a nest av larks the day before, but he forgot to remember to bring them!"

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MIRACLE

#### I

IT was a time of slackness. There were more workers than work, more cobblers than broken boots. Demand did not create supply. Poor folk like us are adepts in the art of geting along on little but living on nothing is something only fairies can accomplish, and we made sorry imitators. At the bottom we had no credit system—no reserve for rainy

days. All days were wet in that respect, and "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" was one of the doctrines we practised without faith.

Shoemakers cannot go out into the streets and examine the people's footwear. At least Jamie didn't. We blamed nobody. Nobody was to blame. There was nothing in the scheme of things as we knew it, that could provide work when there was no work to do. The ways of Providence to us were inscrutable. The State was still further removed from our ken. If we were conscious of any obligation to such an abstract thing, it was to keep out of jail. It never occurred to any of us that such an obligation might be mutual.

Hunger was never wholly a matter of misery. No casual visitor would ever have suspected we were starving. We never lost our sense of humour. I could have fought with a hungry dog for a bone, if there was anything on it, without shame, but to ask any one for a mouthful of bread would have been an eternal disgrace. To "let on" was saying good-bye to what is called self-respect.

## II

It was Wednesday morning. I was up early because a gnawing at the pit of my stomach would not permit me to sleep.

"Is there any hope th' day?" I asked Anna, as I was about to start for work.

"Oh, ay, dear," she said cheerfully, "there's always the chance of a miracle."

It was the third day of the aching void. For a boy of my age I worked hard. The more energy I spent the keener I felt the need for supply. During the forenoon I worked as hard as ever. At noontime, while others were eating, I ran off to the woods to

hide the fact that I had nothing to eat. I spent the noon hour thinking of ways and means. Part of my work was to feed cattle. I made up my mind to steal some of the turnips. The idea of eating while those at home had nothing, did not appeal to me. It looked mean. I changed my plans. I determined to give my scruples a rest and do something for the family.

I had been wondering what Anna meant by a miracle. In a hazy sort of way I imagined that it meant the supply of food by the help of God, but just how God could do it was a mystery. I got very weak in the afternoon. Out of such weakness comes desperation. I made up my mind to perform the miracle myself!

The hour and the place and the surroundings are as vividly fixed in my mind at this minute as they were then. My whole nature changed. If there is such a thing as a criminal mind, I became possessed of it at that minute. I looked upon all around me with suspicion. That is how they regarded me. I was sure of that. Something sprang into existence within me, something new and strange. I felt like a fox in the midst of a pack of hounds. Hunger had battered out of my mind all ethics, all morals, all religion. The right of property, always held up as sacred before me, vanished. Fear of jails, peelers, masters, laws, customs, and conventions had disappeared. With an agility and cunning born of despair, I planned the exploit. The darkness helped me. I secured the sack and crept stealthily out to the potato pit which was in a field, close to the land steward's house. I had helped to arrange this long pit. There were ten tons in it, and there were other pits of a similar size. When my conscience stung me, I quieted it by argument, by many arguments, each of them good, but not quite good enough. Here

were potatoes for everybody, and plenty to spare. If I had asked I could certainly have had some as a gift, well, why not save my pride and take them?

I got down on my knees, and with my bare hands clawed away the earth. I took about a stone of them, covered the hole, and ran. Fifty yards away was the railway. Nobody walked there by night. It was too dangerous. That suited me. It was only a mile to the town, and I took my time. The perspiration poured down my face. I got nervous, and sat down on the potatoes for a rest.

When I reached the town head I put the sack under my arm and tried to look unconcerned. I quickened my steps and looked neither to the right nor to the left. Of course, by this time the stone seemed a ton, but visions of the joy ahead gave me added strength.

Before entering, I cautiously looked through the window. The family were alone around the fire. In, I walked and dropped the sack on the floor. A few faggots were burning on the hearth, a candle burned in the sconce in her corner. They all looked and gasped.

“What’s that?” Anna asked.

“It’s th’ miracle!” I said.

In that instant I realised what I was up against, but I depended on their hunger helping me out. Jamie muttered something. I didn’t hear it. I was waiting for *her* judgment. That was final. If she gave in I was all right, and we would feast and be merry. If she stood firm I was lost. My sister arose to get them. Anna pressed her back on her stool. Jamie looked at me, then looked at my mother. The moment was intense. Hunger was acute. Nature was in revolt.

“Son o’ mine,” she said in a trembling tone, “you wouldn’t break yer oul’ mother’s heart, wud

ye?" The words cut me like a knife. The soft emphasis on "you" aroused in me bitter resentment.

"We're starvin' t' death!" I yelled, as I stamped my bare foot on the mud floor. "They've got plenty ~~but~~ there! Everybody's got plenty, an' I tuk them, an' we'll keep them, an' ate them." And I dropped on the floor beside the sack and burst into tears. There was a moment's silence. Then I began again to protest.

"Silence, you!" Jamie shouted in a voice that made me shiver from head to foot. I heard her sigh. Ah, that deep sigh, which was the forerunner of a sob! I think I hear it now.

She took her apron in her hands and covered her face. Our hearts sunk within us. Jamie made a move towards me, in anger, but she put a hand out and held him on his seat.

"Get me my little shawl, Mary."

I knew what was in her mind, and as quick as a flash I arose, seized the sack, and fled into the darkness.

### III

The front street had few lamps, but they were burning more brightly than usual. I kept out of their glare as much as possible. I avoided people as I avoided light. I feared to meet the boys who knew me more than I feared the police. My face was tear-streaked, and I would have to explain it or fight. I invented a dozen excuses and explanations, none of which either excused or explained. I was full of remorse, and the potatoes were now as heavy and cumbersome as a dead elephant.

From one side of the street to the other I went, courting the shadows. Sometimes the sack was over my shoulder, at other times under my arm.

When I reached the railway bridge at the edge of

the town, I put the potatoes on the bridge wall and climbed up beside them to plan out this remorseful purgatorial journey. I recalled the number of men killed on the railway, and not knowing anything about the train schedule, I decided to take the road. Con' Mulholland, the night watchman, carried a gun. I had seen him load it, and I feared Con more than I feared the police.

Again I shouldered the sack and started. The road was rough, the night was dark as pitch. I kept as near the middle of the road as I could. The sharp stones made walking painful. I tried the footpath. It was soft to my bare feet, but I forgot the little gullies and went headlong over one. Farren's farmhouse was half-way to my destination ; when I got within a hundred yards of it the dog barked. I felt for a stone, just as a matter of precaution. The beast kept barking until I got hundreds of yards beyond.

There was a little hill on the right that I used to know as the "Fairy Mountain." I knew the fairies lived there. What would they think of me ? Perhaps they, too, stole when they were hungry ! Oh, no, that was impossible, for they could perform real miracles. Besides, if they were hard up they had the leprachaun.

As I drew near, I imagined myself before one of their judges. I invented my defence, but it wasn't convincing. No, the fairies could not be fooled. I heard sounds. The cold sweat broke out on my brow, and the potatoes now felt as heavy as cobble stones. My legs grew weaker, but if I dropped there it would be like an invitation to them to come and carry me off. I pressed on, quickening my pace into a dog-trot.

Half a mile ahead there was a bend in the road. Just as I felt assured that the fairies had ignored me, a carriage with two glaring lamps turned the bend of the road and came tearing towards me. I knew

all the coachmen within ten miles. They knew me. The lamps lit up every inch of the road as they passed. I threw the potatoes on my back and pulling the loose end of the sack over my head, walked as close to the hedge as I could get.

When the carriage passed, I sat down on the roadside. The perspiration had made sodden wet every rag of clothing on my body. I stretched myself at full length on my back, and lay with my head on the potatoes. Here a new mental disturbance diverted me from my remorse and agony for a while. Just about where I lay, I met every morning for months a little girl who made an early journey to Antrim daily in order to catch the early train for Belfast. She was studying music. One day I nerved myself up to the point of asking Withero who she was. The stone-breaker's reply was so brutal that I almost resolved never to carry his hammers home again.

"Yis, of coorse," said he, "she's the chile of Misther Seeds, an' ye'd bether save yer sheep's eyes fur some-  
thin' more common. They're quality, ye know!"

Despite this wet blanket advice of the cynic, I looked forward with increasing interest to this daily inspiration.

If she could see me now, what would she think? Of course, I had never spoken to her, my hopes never rose to that height, but what did that matter? The look in my mother's eyes filled me with remorse, but if the little girl in the pink dress could see me I would feel unfit to live.

I resolved there and then that if I got out of this awful scrape I would save up somehow and get a pair of boots and a hard hat—the hat first, so that if she ever spoke to me I could raise it politely.

The rest cooled my clothes. They now hung round me like cold, wet dish rags, and I shivered. I pulled myself together and pushed on. I was in the danger

zone. Bleaching greens were all around me, and Con was standing in some corner with his gun all ready. He was reputed to have the eyes of a cat and the scent of a setter dog.

My fear increased as I neared the bend of the road.' I put the sack down and put my ear to the ground. I knew Indians did that. I heard sounds. They were indistinct, but disquieting enough to further shake my nerves. I was weak, my steps were slow, and my hair felt as if it was standing straight up. For the first time I wavered in my intention to put the potatoes back. I thought of throwing them over the hedge and completing the job in the morning. That would involve a lie, and my mother could look right into the centre of my soul and see its blackness.

We had two books at home. One was an old backless Bible, and the other a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. I called to mind the wood-cut where Pilgrim stands at the gate with his pack upon his back. I remembered that Anna had spelled out to me the words over the gate. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." I wondered what Pilgrim had in his pack. Anna said he had sins in it. I wondered if God charged me with a sin for each potato, or whether the whole business counted as one big potato sin? I began to count my sins. Jamie said whistling on Sunday was a sin. If that was so, what was the use of counting? I had enough sins of that character to burn me to ashes without the potatoes.

I turned the bend in the road. The old quaker graveyard was right there. I dreaded to pass it. That was where Hughie Thornton had seen the Banshee. If she turned up, I was sure she would scare me to death, and if I was found dead beside the sack next morning, all the world would know of my sin. As I passed the gate I tried to persuade myself that ghosts and fairies and Banshees were all humbug.

My feigned scepticism didn't work. My head pained me, my legs grew weaker, and I felt as if I was about to faint. I had only fifty yards to go now, but they seemed fifty miles.

I held my breath and listened before making a final dash for the potato pit. Not a sound could be heard save the rustling of the leaves of the trees. As I crept stealthily along, I stepped on a sharp stone and fell. For a minute or two I was unable to rise. It was too late to go back. The pain in my head grew intense, but I arose and staggered the rest of the way. I had to push a gate open to enter a field. It creaked. I was sure the noise could be heard a mile away. I waited a minute and then went through, and in a few seconds was sitting beside the hole in the pit. Just as I had put them back and scraped the earth over the hole, I heard voices. The road was only a few yards away, but a wall stood between. The voices grew more and more distinct.

Some man had escorted home to the land steward's house a young lady who was staying there. The little garden gate was within ten yards of the potato pit. They stopped at the gate. I held my breath again. They could hear me breathe if they listened, but they were too busy. They kept laughing and kissing. I thought they would never part. What idiots! I thought. I couldn't move. I dare hardly breathe, and they kept on and on! Then nature gave out, exhaustion flattened me out on my back, and I fell asleep.

## IV

When I awoke everything was as still as the grave. The darkness was more intense than ever. Horrible dreams had haunted me. Ghosts had come trooping out of the Quaker graveyard. I had been chased

and captured several times, but somehow I always escaped. In this chaotic nightmare Con Mulholland figured prominently with his gun. The dog at Farren's farm was there too. I knew nothing of the time. I could not tell how long I had slept. Every joint in my body seemed like the rusty hinges of the gate that creaked.

When I reached the road I felt as free as a bird. The fearful crime was as though it had never been committed. I was on the king's highway, and the potatoes were in the pit, and who could swear that they had ever been out? I invented a whole catalogue of lies to tell any peeler, watchman, or banshee if they held me up! I had a right on the king's highway, it was the only right I had, or thought I had. Of course, being on it at midnight might make a difference. If so, that's where the lies would come in handy.

On the return journey I was engrossed with conflicting emotions. The burden was gone, and I felt as if I was walking on air. When I passed the Quaker graveyard and the "Fairy Mountain" and Farren's farm, I imagined all sorts of gruesome happenings. Past each of these places I ran as fast as my weak legs would permit me. I couldn't run very fast. It was so dark, and I was weak, but the sprinting was quite a creditable performance.

The town lamps were out. I groped my way with my bare feet down the street. Not a sound could be heard, not a light was visible. As I neared Pogue's Entry, I groped along the walls of the houses. Within a few doors of my home I began to feel like a drunken person. I was dazed, and began to reel and stagger. As I laid my hands on the entrance of the Entry, I touched a human form!

The touch unnerved me, and I utterly collapsed. The human was my mother, who was keeping her vigil for the return of the prodigal.

Next morning my mother came up the little ladder to the half loft and aroused me. The gnawing pain of hunger was keen, but her face was smiling again. "It was jist nothin' but a bad dhrame, dear," she said, as she kissed me and sent me off to work.

Ah ! what a beautiful world I entered that morning ! How beautifully the birds sang, and how kind the trees were !

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CANDLE IN THE WINDOW

#### I

I NEVER knew what started the trouble. But that a great sorrow had come I could tell by the dazed look on her face. Something had happened to an elder brother of mine. He did not come to supper, and his stool at Anna's request was left vacant.

Folk who think little, adjust themselves easily to any change of circumstance, and as Anna did most of the thinking for our family she adopted the method of the vacant stool to acquaint us with the fact that something had gone wrong.

It was inevitable, of course, that my elder brother should go out into the larger world some time, but to leave in a "huff" was what hurt her heart. Besides, there was no room in such small quarters for grown-up men. It was something bordering on the miraculous how we got along as well as we did.

If he had left the town we would have been saved the shame of his taking lodgings with the Bennets.

My brother had a tender heart, and a tongue that was always tipped with kindness. No angry word had ever passed between him and my mother. My

father, towards the grown-up sons, was generous to a fault. In fact, there came a time when the word of my elder brother was law in our household. Knowing all that, we were mystified when the rupture of relations came.

Not a word passed the lips of the old people in criticism. It was the biggest burden of sorrow I had ever seen there—a sorrow that bound them together in a new way. Jamie's tones became more tender. We could not escape it, for when Anna had sorrow we saw it on her face, and a pall hung over the temperament of the household.

When she learned that he had taken up lodgings at the Bennets, she sent a note to him. It was written at the back window beside the bed. She had written letters to a sister of mine who was first to leave the home ; but this was the first she had written to a son. Years afterwards he told me about it. The only thing in it that he remembered was her promise to have a candle in the window every night until he returned

We were all rough-hewn people, and the fine edges were few and hard to find. My brother was a labourer, and his life and language was devoid of an idealism that overtook him later in life. He didn't give the incident much thought, because, perhaps, he was unaware of the nature of the soul from whom he had abruptly severed himself. That was a failing common to us all.

I was an eye-witness of the installation of the first candle. It was a sensational episode. It was a common halfpenny "dip." She lit it, and sticking it to the bottom of a small plate, placed it in the front window. Then she returned to her chimney corner and sat alone beside the smouldering embers until it had burnt itself out.

There were four houses in our entry. Directly

opposite lived McGrath, the ragman. Next door to him lived O'Hare, the chimney sweep. Mary McConaghy lived next door to us.

The candle, though small, lit up the whole front of McGrath's house. They went to bed at dusk every night. None of us had ever seen a light in their house. McGrath's wife and daughter shared the ragman's philosophy that darkness was intended for sleep and daylight for work, so they went to bed in the twilight, and arose with the first gray light of dawn. So they were not disturbed by the candle. That could not be said of us, however. The light could not penetrate the bedroom when the door was shut, but, weak and yellow though the rays were, they lit up the rest of our house, and it was some time before we could get accustomed to it. I lay in the loft, under the roof beams, and the rays of the candle, combined with the mystery of the arrangement, made it at first difficult to go to sleep.

I did not need to be told the meaning of the candle. I knew it as plainly by instinct as if I had been informed of the details. I found myself listening for his footfalls coming down the entry, night after night. I could never see her face, but I heard deep sighs, and at times imagined I heard smothered sobs. Perhaps I was mistaken. She did talk—but not to him.

## II

The nightly vigil was one of those incidents that could not be long hidden from the notice of the neighbours. In a few days everybody around us knew about it. Those to whom any gossip was a sweet morsel came in to express sorrow. Anna never discussed the subject with any of them. She discussed it very little with Jamie. He tried by all the means in his power to persuade her to abandon it—or at

least to retire and let the candle alone do the silent watching.

"I've never asked for things ye hadn't t' give, haave I, Jamie?"

"Oh, no, no, it's not that—it's fur yer own sake, Anna."

"Then please let me alone—th' heart sorrow is all I can bear, and—"

"I shall say no more, Anna, not a —— word!"

We all hoped that Sunday would bring a change. He would have the day off, and would surely call and relieve the tension. Anna arrayed herself in her best linen cap, and the house was given a special "reddin'" up.

We had callers all the afternoon. Every footfall on the cobble stones startled us for a moment. We knew who was coming by the sound of their brogues. His footfall was one of the most familiar.

He didn't come. None of us made any remarks about his failure. As the shadows of evening began to fall, Anna put the kettle on and prepared the supper. We had no visitors then, and feeling that she would be more pained than usual, we were glad to be alone.

To our astonishment she seemed in lighter vein than she had been in for months. Her repartee was more subtle and humorous. Her laugh was contagious. We were not always aware of the fine points, but we laughed because she laughed. Jamie's face was a study. It glowed.

"Yer heart's not so sore," he ventured to say quietly.

"It gets sorer every day, dear, but I'm learnin' m' lesson."

"Ay, well, we're niver too ould t' learn, Anna, are we?"

"No. But it came t' me all of a sudden that I

'was jist doin' t' you and th' wains what m' poor boy unbeknownst t' himself was doin' t' me."

"Acushla, we're more consarned about you than about him—ye see, he's young, an' he's got them fellahs about him."

"M' cloud of sorrow will no longer darken your heart, Jamie. A love that seeks jist what belongs to itself is pure selfishness, with a nicely-named cloak thrown around its shoulders!"

"Ah," Jamie said, "we niver know what's under a high hat or shufflin' along in a pair ov brogues!"

"There's jist Wan that knows."

"Ah, ay, ov coarse, but He's God, an' He disn't let on!"

The glory of the Celtic mind, whether in literature or in life, is in its moods. Ephemeral it may be, and fluid.

Anna's face reflected all her moods. Her look would smite us with an unspeakable sorrow and a minute later we would observe a change that would provoke laughter. In this case she played a part. Her poignant heart agony was hidden behind a smiling face. The lighter mood made no change in the arrangements. That night, when the curfew bell had tolled and we had retired, the candle was placed in the window as usual. Jamie remained in the corner until the wick collapsed in the tallow and the vigil was over for the night.

It was inevitable that my brother should hear about the welcome light that spoke so eloquently of a heart that was dark with sorrow. The news did not soften him. It was not that he was hard. He had, perhaps, grown weary of home restraint, and now that he had broken away he was not pleased to be told that his absence had furnished the whole neighbourhood with gossip.

He intended to come, but he put it off again and

again. He resented being told that he had a duty there. He intended to send word or write a note in the meantime ; but that also he postponed to a more convenient season. It was our first family problem of a filial nature. So little would have healed the breach. The longer it was postponed, the harder it became. The poor are disciplined by necessity. They pay heavy penalties for ignorance. Our lives at certain stages are guided by impulse. There is a lack of finesse. The amenities are crude because we have only a cash nexus with those to whom social intercourse is part of the fine art of living.

At the very core of our natures we possess the essentials—the materials—for things high and fine and noble. We demonstrate all that when we get a chance, but that rarely occurs.

A fine-strung nature amongst us, therefore, is often roughly handled, not because we are more brutal than any other class, but because the rough edges of our primordial instincts have little chance of being smoothed by the refining influence of whatever culture there may be around us.

### III

We soon became accustomed to what Jamie called “her notion.” We never imagined that her frail body would get tired. One morning as I sat up on my straw pallet and looked over the edge of the loft into the chimney corner, I saw a sight that produced my first great fear. Anna was lying flat on her back on the mud floor. Her arms were extended, and she looked very white. I stopped breathing for a minute to listen. I could hear no sound. I swiftly descended the little ladder, and rushing into the bedroom, aroused Jamie. Fear had deprived me of speech,

but when Jamie saw the terror in my face he needed no explanation. In a moment he was at her side.

"Ye devil's imp!" he said to me, as she opened her eyes, "ye scared the sowl out o' me!"

"I jist fell asleep, dear," she said.

"Ay, but shure than fellal'll be th' death o' ye, wuman," he said, as he took her arm and helped her to her stool.

As she rose I noticed something in her hand. She saw me looking at it, and quickly thrust her hand beneath her apron.

An uncanny sort of feeling came over me. Had the fairies visited her in the night? I wondered. She brought her hand out, but it was empty. I knew whatever it was she had left it on her lap.

Jamie was inclined to be gruff at first, but the soft look in her eyes made him ashamed, and he worked his gruffness off on me.

"Here," says he, "don't stand there like a stuck pig lukin' at yer mother—get some sticks t' light th' fire!"

"Don't ate his head off, Jamie."

"Ah cudn't, Anna," he said, with a softening tone. "It's wuden."

I got sticks and peat and proceeded to light the fire, but I kept a sharp eye on her lap. Jamie filled the kettle, and hung it on the chain, and then coaxed her to go to bed.

"If ye'll jist lie down an' haave forty winks, Ah'll make ye a cup o' tay that'll make ye ten years younger—Ah will that."

"Ye're a brave man, Jamie, but jist make it nine, an' give me th' tay first."

As I struck a match to light the fire Anna rose, and, forgetting about what she had hidden from my curiosity, it dropped on the floor. She snatched it up instantly, but too late. The secret was out. It

was a baby's shoe—*his* shoe, the first he had ever worn.

"It's quare," said Jamie in a kindly tone, "how we bamboozle ourselves when we're thinkin' long."

"Ay, dear, it's th' ould question of a dhrownin' man clutchin' at a straw—only in this case it's a sinkin' ould crayther of a wuman puttin' all her nice memories into a baby's boot."

"He's a mane baste, an'll weep salt tears some o' these days," said Jamie indignantly.

"We're all spun out o' th' same yarn, Jamie. He's jist doin' what we all do, an' do every day."

"An' what might that be, if ye plaze?"

"Oh, jist forgettin' t' be nice."

At last the vigil ended. The candle no longer lit up the wee shop of Pogue's Entry. It had burned there only for a few weeks anyway.

Then he came and kissed her good-bye before he left for Scotland,

To my brother, the incident at the time was a matter of no importance at all. Years later he saw it from her point of view. As he mingled with men and women he began to understand something of the tenderness of a mother's heart. In his letters he began to express a little of this new understanding. Not much, however, for, like my father, "soft words" to him were weak and for feminine use. He made up his mind to tell her himself, some day, how bitterly he had regretted the candle incident, but just as he put off walking across the street and ending the vigil, so he postponed the fulfilment of his good intentions, until one day he walked into our little cottage in Pogue's Entry and saw her lying in her coffin.

Many years afterwards he told me of that last visit. It is many years since he followed her into the unknown, but his words are still ringing in my ears.

"It wasn't the fact that she was dead—we've all got to go that way," he said in a vacant sort of way.

" It was something that cut deeper than that. It was a shadow over my heart. I seemed to stand between a lighted candle and her cold, white face, but the shadow fell on my heart.

" I couldn't get away from the candle. Night and day it was there. There was much to do, for father was as helpless as a baby. He wouldn't accept death. He talked to her just as usual. In the middle of the night—the night of the wake—the little crowd of neighbours who sat around the hearth had a cup of tea—Jamie took his cup into the room, and we heard him say, " Anna, dear, won't ye haave jist a wee sup ? "

" I looked around towards the window and there stood the candle burning as brightly as it did when I was breaking her heart. Ah, God, the agony of that light burning in my mind ! I did not speak of it. Nobody there would have understood. Looking into that dear white face for the last time was an agony. Trying to soothe and quiet the old man was heartrending. To listen to the words of the neighbours, to hear their sobs and see their tears, tried my strength ; but all of them combined was as nothing compared to the pain of that mental image of a burning candle in that little window !

" Years later I ceased to be pained by its appearance. I learned to look upon it as her welcome light on the pathway to that other home where there shall be no more crying and all tears shall have been wiped away."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COMING OF THE LAMP

#### I

THE Wilsons had a lamp two years before we seriously considered giving up candles. A lamp seemed beyond our reach, anyway, and even apart from the question of finance, my father had worked by the light of tallow candles for over a generation. Jamie didn't want to be accused of slavishly imitating a neighbour.

When a customer suggested a lamp, he would avoid the discussion. If he couldn't avoid it he would use his stock argument:—

“They're too dangerous, an' they say if ye dhrop a match in th' oil, ye'd blow th' house up.”

“An' wouldn't that same happen if ye dhropped it in gunpowdther?”

“Ay, to be sure, but we're not usin' gunpowdther.”

Continued suggestions had their effect upon him. He had always said he would burn candles while he lived. He had to confess to Anna, however, that the Wilsons' lamp was a wonder, filling the room with a white light. Anna was for a lamp. He was obdurate. About once a week the thing was mentioned in a casual way. One day Mrs. Wilson came in, and Anna drew from her the comparative prices of lamps and candles.

The lamp was cheaper. “But,” Mrs. Wilson said, “if it was ten times as dear we wouldn't go back to candles.”

I think this convincing colloquy was staged by Anna just as an extra vigorous suggestion for Jamie.

"If there was aany wan here who could work the d—d thing," he said one day, "I wouldn't mind, maybe."

"We'd jist haave to learn like the Wilsons, dear," Anna replied.

"Ay, I know rightly they had, but there was a time when they hadn't it."

"We've no place t' hang it."

"Shure it's aisy enough to hammer a nail in the roof."

"What's the use, whin I'm jist tottherin' to th' grave, anyway?"

"If it's as dark as they say it is, Jamie, the whiter the light the betther, and forby, shure Jamie Wilson is tottherin' in th' same direction."

"M' mind's all throughother wi' yer argymants, Anna, an' I've got this sole t' finish," was his parting shot.

Jamie became thoroughly convinced that a lamp gave better light than a candle. He was convinced that it was cheaper. The trouble was in his obstinacy. He didn't want to give in. He knew he would have to do so, but he would hold out as long as he could.

The question of lamp or no lamp became a vital issue in our domestic affairs. We boys and girls kept extolling the glories of the Wilson lamp. We gave Jamie little peace. Being as convinced as we were, he became less and less irritated.

"Ye've all got lamps on the brain," he said one night; "ye'd think ye were all born in a lamp shop t' hear ye! Ye'd luk fine if ye were all blown out ov th' roof and come down in bits—wudn't ye now?"

We laughed loudly. Anna laughed too, and remarked:—

"You'd have to borrow a lamp to gather up the fragments, Jamie!"

There came a time when the problem was no longer one of relative merits or comparative cost.' When Jamie said to Anna :

" Well, ye might find out th' cost ov this new-fangled notion," we knew the battle was won.

Down to William Vance's we went *en masse*.

" We're goin' to haave a lamp," I said to Bill Gainer as I went along.

" Why don't ye go in fur gas ? " said Bill, with a turn of his nose.

Going and coming I must have told at least a score of boys.

Sensations like that had a way of spreading in our quarter, where everybody knew or wanted to know everybody else's business. When we returned we were furnished with all the information the town afforded on lamps, wicks, and oil. Years later Jamie confessed that nothing of this was news to him, for one day, unknown to us, he had sneaked into Vance's and inquired all about them himself.

The next step was the money to buy the lamp. That was a real difficulty. The house began to retrench and save. I was selling newspapers at the time, and the prospect of a lamp increased my energy. I found myself really caring whether people bought papers or not.

It took nearly a month to arrive at " The Day." When we arrived, Jamie himself went for it. He warned us not to follow him. Any one of us found on the street was to have the stirrup ! Well, if we got the lamp, that wouldn't matter, but we kept clear of him. We followed at a distance. We watched him enter the shop.

It seemed as if it took him hours to buy that lamp. Two sisters and I stood at the church gate with our eyes riveted on Vance's door.

Finally he came with a box under his arm, and

we moved back towards Pogue's Entry—casting furtive glances backwards to watch his movements.

Jamie carried that lamp as if it was the ark of the covenant. Coming through High Street no one took any notice, but when he came as far as John Darragh's blacksmith's shop the neighbours were at the doors. Not all of them. I had not had time to alarm the whole upper part of the town. He had a cutty pipe in his mouth, just to help him look unconcerned. When he was within a hundred yards we ran down the entry and alarmed Anna.

"Whisht, dear, keep quiet," was all she said, but she was just as excited as any of us.

Before the box was opened the neighbours were discussing it at the mouth of the entry. Some of the more familiar ones ventured over the doorstep, just to offer a few remarks on the weather. Jamie was untying the strings when Anna arose, and taking the box, passed into the bedroom, and, depositing it on the window, returned to entertain the visitors. Jamie lit his pipe and sat down on the bench and began to work. We were irritated, but a look at Anna's face was all the explanation we needed.

## II

The social code of the bottom of the world is quite flexible, the amenities are rather crude. Our neighbours used our front door as if it had been the gate of a public park. But nature makes up for what human nature leaves undone.

We all had keen intuitions, and the intuitive faculty cleared our house in five minutes. They did not need to be told to go. They went.

When the house was cleared, Jamie shut the door and barred it. Then the box was produced and we gathered around.

"Be careful of the chimney!" said Anna, as Jamie drew it forth first.

"Oh, don't be afraid," he said. "I handled half a dozen while I was in the shop jist fur practice."

"Did they show ye how to light it?"

"No!"

"Why?"

"D'ye think I'd make an exhibition ov m' ignorance t' Vance?"

Carefully the parts were laid out on the table. A piece of wick stuck in the burner. Jamie screwed it on the reservoir. Anna took the chimney and adjusted it, and Jamie struck a match to light it.

"Ye've forgot something, dear."

"What?"

"Oil."

Jamie scratched his head and smiled.

"Ay, ye're right fur onct," he said, and then looking at her he continued in an abstract sort of way:

"Will ye iver forget the first box of matches we iver seen?"

"I mind it rightly."

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, "they got wet and we put them close to the fire to dhry, an' off they went! Ha, ha! Well, well, well—"

"Oil, Jamie, oil, dear. We can't keep that door barred all day, ye know."

Oil cans were discussed. Wilsons, of course, had one. The financial situation was canvassed. We didn't know the exact price of them, but we knew that the exchequer could not at that juncture bear the strain. Being most fleet of foot, I was despatched with a jug for our first pint of oil.

It was with difficulty that I squeezed through the neighbours who crowded the narrow entry. Everybody knew my mission. I told them! Two pals—favourites, were on the street. I took them along.

Down through the town we sped for the oil. I could have gotten it at Farren's, a few hundred yards away, but, as Jamie would say, we had Vance on the brain.

Jamie had overestimated the price of oil. I had a penny too much. "Bon," one of the pals, suggested a stick of barley sugar. I hesitated. Vance might have under-charged, and would demand the penny later, and my pantaloons were thin. I stoutly resisted—not on moral scruples, but because I knew Jamie.

As we came up past the church a lad named Scott stepped in front of me, and wanted to settle an old score.

I couldn't settle. I hadn't a marble in my possession.

"Fight 'im!" said Bob. "Go on! I'll hold the oil."

I thought of the barred door and the waiting family. A scrap was a tame affair compared to the lamp, and I demurred. As I moved on, Scott held his arm up and spat over it. The Irishman never lived who could refuse that most aggravating of all challenges and live it down! I handed the oil to Bob and mixed it with Scott. A crowd gathered and egged us on; we were both winded and spent when some one shouted:—

"Skip! There's a peeler."

"We'll be at Pigeon Hill th' morra asthernoon," said Bob to Scott, as I wiped the blood from my nose and ran up town.

"What the — — kept ye?" said Jamie impatiently, as he opened the door.

"The shop was full o' people!" I said in a tone of injured innocence.

"Which ov them tore yer shirt, dear?" Anna asked, as she critically looked me over.

Happily for me, Jamie was too much engrossed with the lamp to notice the remark. He was filling the reservoir. That done, he wiped his hands behind the

front of his trousers and screwed on the burner. Anna lit it, and he adjusted the chimney. Somebody knocked.

"Let them dundther!" said Jamie, as the flame shot up through the glass.

Something went wrong. The thing smoked. We were all excited. The chimney must be removed. Instinctively we all saw that at the same moment.

Jamie took the chimney in his hand. He didn't hold it long.

"Phewt—Jazus!" he exclaimed. "I've roasted m' hand off!" and the chimney dropped in fragments on the mud floor.

"Here endeth the first lesson," said Anna, as she picked up the bits of glass and threw them behind the burning peat. Jamie turned down the flame. Nobody said anything, but we all saw clearly that if he had done it sooner he would have saved himself and the chimney.

"I knew it—I was sure ov it from the start," he said. "I'm goin' back t' candles, an' stick t' them till I die."

Our hearts sank within us, but Anna, always the champion of Hope, always the discoverer of silver linings, revived our drooping spirits. Jamie abandoned the project. He sat down at his bench and went on with his work. Anna whispered something to Mary. I didn't hear what it was, but Jamie seemed to know, for he arose from the bench and raised his voice in protest. That raised voice always made us shiver—not because it meant anything in particular, but because it could be heard outside in the entry.

"No, no," said he, "ye will not ask Misthress Wilson, nor Misster Wilson, nor Misster Vance aither, t' come in here and examine our ignorance. If ye do, jist as sure as gun's iron, I'll take the whole d—d prakus an' dance on it! I will that!"

"As ye had a little practice in handlin' them, Jamie, naybe ye'd like a wee bit of practice in dancin' on hese bits first."

"It's no laughin' matter."

"No, dear, nor dancin' matther aither."

### III

Jamie lit his pipe and smoked as he hammered. Anna gathered up the lamp and removed the activities to her bedroom. She opened the front door and let those who were burning up with curiosity venture in. She then went into her room and shut the door. We followed.

Instead of proceeding with lamp arrangements, she took the money out of her little leather purse and looked at it. She didn't count it. She knew how many pennies were there. They hadn't increased. She was just swithering what to do. We saw the problem on her face, and were already voting for the chimney.

Jamie was pretending to be in high dudgeon, but he knew in his heart that the problem would not end where he left it. In a few minutes he joined us in the bedroom and shut the door after him.

"Well," he grunted, "are ye still crackin' yer brains over bein' quality an' haavin' a lamp jist because th' Wilsons have one?"

"No, dear," Anna said, "we have decided that. We are jist tryin' to make up our minds whether we'll have light for supper—or porridge."

"We'll have porridge!" said Jamie.

"I think we'll haave light, dear."

"It's a mortal pity there isn't an extra pair ov trousers in th' house. Ye might put them on jist to show yer authority," he replied tartly.

"Shure it's brains and good sense we need, Jamie,

an' if throusers don't give them to you, they wouldn't be likely to give them to me, aither."

"Egad, it's quare what odd notions wimin do haave these days," he answered, as he went out and resumed his work at the bench.

"What haave ye in yer pockets?" Anna asked me.

"A peerie and shtring, an' four marbles an' a catapult," I answered, with some curiosity and alarm.

"Lave them all on that window sill an' run to Vance's for a new chimney for the lamp.

The news that we had failed got noised abroad in the entry somehow and as I came out with my face aglow and eyes sparkling with excitement, the curious eyed me critically and followed my movements until I was out of sight.

While I was gone, Anna had performed a miracle. She had persuaded Jamie to hammer a stout nail in a rafter of the roof—just over his bench.

"It's not that I'm givin' in," he said, "but jist because I know that whin a woman makes her mind on somethin' her tongue keeps waggin' on't like a wheel without a cog—ay, that's jist it, now ye have it."

But he took care that it was the right kind of nail, and that it was so driven that a lamp could be safely suspended therefrom. I had left the house under the impression that the supper money had gone into the lamp chimney but Anna had resources that often baffled us. When I returned she was preparing supper. Of course it wasn't the regular ration, but it was supper.

In the twilight Jamie got his old candlestick as usual and arranged the big penny candle in it—a sort of notice to the family that he was determined to hold out to the last ditch.

The parts of the lamp, with the new chimney, were laid out on the bed, and we were ordered out of the bedroom, and the door was closed. Operations were

suspended until the neighbours who still hung around got tired, and we had our evening meal.

Hardly a word was spoken that night at supper. We children were excited still—full of pent-up emotion. Towards the close of this abbreviated meal hour we were informed by Anna that outside curiosity was not to be satisfied that night.

“It’s no use glunchin’,” Jamie said, as he watched the disappointment spread over our faces.

“Is Mrs. Wilson goin’ t’ show ye how t’ light it?” Mary asked.

“She isn’t!” Jamie said, as he glowered at her.

Here was another mystery. Jamie and Anna had evidently struck a compromise—and we had not been informed. We couldn’t go out then? We had nothing to tell.

When the town clock struck nine, and Sammy Cooper tolled out the days of the month, we had to go to bed—always. That night, for the first time in my memory, the hours dragged along at an aggravatingly slow pace. Jamie worked at the bench, and Anna was evidently not feeling so badly, for he sung *Black-Eyed Susan* and *The Old Gray Mare* that night. The world was always swinging round correctly on its axis when Jamie sang. Anna evidently was pleased. We could tell that by her face. There was nothing for us to do but grin and bear it—for a night.

As I lay on my pallet that night in the little half loft I became suspicious that the old folk were going to put that lamp up during the night and rob us of the sensation of being in at the start. They sat at the turf fire, talking in an undertone. From the sound of Jamie’s voice I knew that the storm had passed. The forces of reform and reaction had triumphed—the lion and the lamb were comparing notes!

With but a slight movement of my head I could

look over the edge of the loft and see them at the fire. There was a candle in the little tin sconce in her corner, and Jamie had put on a few extra clods of peat. *The Weekly Budget* had been tacked over the window to prevent curious eyes from looking inside. The opposition to the lamp was not wholly and entirely, after all, a matter of obstinacy or dislike of change. They had their weight in deciding the question, but there was one drawback, equally recognised by both, but now slowly emerging in the confession of Jamie. He did not use it as an argument—the argumentative stage had been passed. It was an explanation.

My three brothers had gone away, one after another, to push their fortunes in other parts. They seldom wrote. Two had to get others to do it, anyway, and the third had a family and cares enough of his own. One of the gentle delusions of that far-off life in Pogue's Entry was connected with the burning candles that nightly lit up our cottage, and beside which Jamie worked at his trade.

A bright little shining spark about the size of a pin-head would occasionally appear on the burning wick. To us poor folk it was like a little star in a fairy firmament. It was always the harbinger of hope, the forerunner of good news from abroad. It was a sure sign that a letter was on the way. Anna believed it, so did Jamie, so did we all. We would as soon have doubted our very existence. Just as the rainbow was God's sign in the heavens that never again would the world be destroyed by flood, so the bright little spark in the candle was the mystical sign that after all we were not forgotten !

“ I was thinkin' of it all the time, myself,” Anna said.

“ I hate t' give it up,” said Jamie, “ for it's been a more saunty comfort t' me than I ever let on ! ”

While it was yet dark I was awakened by the sound

of hammering in the bedroom. As I listened, the town clock struck three. I dare not move, of course, but next morning the secret came out.

Together they had stayed up all night and mastered with mutual forbearance and with a good deal of childish glee the mysterious mechanism of our first lamp. As soon as it was "daintily" permissible, the family gathered around and exulted on the accomplished fact. There it hung, suspended on a temporary nail awaiting full introduction to its permanent abiding place over the worn bench.

Next night we were bathed in glory ! The new lamp was a new social status. Never had we so many visitors ; they filled the house, they peered in the window, they wondered how we got it and what we would get next ! Jamie was content. Anna was triumphant. She took entire charge of it, but many a time for years afterwards she would turn the lamp out after his work was done, and light the candle in her sconce in the corner. Jamie would smile knowingly. It was for his comfort as much as her own.

## CHAPTER IX

### QUARE PEOPLE

#### I

"**O**UL' Solomon must haave haad a terrible time wi' three hundhred ov them, eh, Jamie ?" Baxter said one night, when the discussion turned on the oddities of "quare people."

"Ay," Jamie said. "An' he must haave haad a cast-iron constitution, but I think it's a feerie story. 'It wud be jist as aisy t' believe that Jonah swallowed the whale as t' believe that aany maan cud answer

th' questions ov sich a crowd—t' say nothin' ov his other juties t' them ! ”

“ It's a mortal wondther that God didn't send a pirta famine or sumthin', t' rejuce them t' sinsible numbers—don't ye think so, Anna ? ”

“ I think,” said Anna, “ that it's more ov a wondther that he wasn't provided wi' a wise oul' bachelor like you, Ben, t' keep 'im in th' straight an' narrow path ! ”

“ Oh, ay,” Baxter replied ; “ shure it's aisly t' see that ye're in fayvor ov laws that wud allow aany oul' throllop t' haave a harem-scarum ov as maany wives as he cud thole, ay, deed, that's aisly seen.”

“ I'm no more in fayvor ov two wives than I am ov two husbands, but it's newins t' hear a woman blamed for laws good or bad ; shure all laws are made t' poor oul' craithurs who're chiefly entitled to make them, because they're not women.”

“ Thry th' weather, Ben,” Jamie said. “ Ye'll haave a betther chance to show off yer powers.”

“ Och ! ” sighed Baxter ; “ shure it bangs Ban-naghter t' see th' conthrariness ov wimin aanyway.”

“ Rubbitch,” said Jamie, “ jist rubbitch ! ”

“ Don't be too hard on him, Jamie,” Anna said. “ Shure all oul' bachelors talk like that till they're married, an' thin——”

“ Ay, an' thin,” interrupted Baxter, “ they talk th' teeth out ov a saw.”

Baxter was sitting in his socks, while James was cobbling his old boots. Anna was making waxed ends. When Baxter sat in his socks he was distinguished by an atmosphere that was all his own. We had no vocabulary for odours. To us they were either good or bad, but the specific gravity of Baxter's was of such a nature that it not only taxed our limited language, but wore our good manners to the thinness of a wafer.

Of course, in these scientific days we have the

pcynometer, hydrometer, and thermometer. By their aid we can estimate the densities, intensities, values, and qualities of such things, but in those far-off days and in that old-fashioned alley, when a thing arrived at a stage when it created nausea, we just described it as "a whiff of Baxter!"

It was this odoriferousness that catalogued him with the "quare" people of our town.

In discussing quare people on this particular evening, Baxter did not mean to be rude, but he interrupted Anna several times, and Jamie had an abrupt and somewhat rough method of fighting for fair play.

"I'll tell ye somethin', Ben," he said, when his opportunity arrived. "If ye manured yer mind wi' the same care that ye manure yer socks, ye wudn't be half as quare as folks think ye are!"

"Ye were awful hard on poor Ben," Anna said, when the house was cleared that night.

"Rubbitch!" said Jamie. "He's got a wooden skull, Anna, an' nothin' short ov a butcher's cleaver wud make an impression on 'im."

An impression had been made, however, for Baxter became quite loquacious in giving reminiscences of quare people he had known.

"Ov coorse," he said, "a maan isn't quare, jist bekase he cyant whustle wi' a hot pirta in his mouth—is he, Anna?"

"Oh, deed no," Anna said; "but it's a through-other mind that makes us do throughother things." The case of Sammy Fisher was cited. Sammy, in the language of our quarter, was described as "wantin a square of bein' round." One day when about three years of age, I was splashing my hands in the old barrel that stood under the spout and caught the rain-water from the roof. I lost my balance and tumbled into the barrel. Sammy happened along at

the moment, and seeing my feet sticking out, he calmly walked in and said :—

“ Ye know yer wee boy, Jamie, don’t ye ? ”

“ Ay,” Jamie said, without stopping his work.

“ Well,” said Sammy, “ he’s bubblin’ away in th’ wather wi’ his heels stickin’ out.”

When Jamie arrived I had ceased to “ bubble.” He pulled me out and brought me back to consciousness. Then he looked around for Sammy, who was bending over the fire, warming his hands. Using one of his select theological phrases, he gave Sammy a vicious kick—where it didn’t hurt much—and informed him that if he ever darkened the door with his shadow again, he would “ bate ” him “ till an inch of his death.”

When Baxter mentioned Sammy’s name as being one of the quare ones, Jamie retorted :—

“ Sammy isn’t quare—he’s an ijot ! ”

## II

At this juncture McGrath, the rag-man, entered with an empty can in his hand.

“ God save ye kindly, one an’ all,” was his salutation. He had come to “ borrow ” a can of “ good clane wather,” to save himself the trouble of going to the town well for it.

“ Ay, an’ welcome, Mr. McGrath,” Anna said. “ Jist dip yer can in th’ crock.” He filled his can and stood for a moment as if hesitating between his wife’s needs and his curiosity to know what we were talking about. He was invited to sit down awhile and share the crack. Down on the floor he flopped beside his can, and fishing a cutty pipe out of his pocket he lit it at a live turf, and proceeded to enjoy a smoke in three keys.

“ We’re jist haavin’ a crack about quare people,”

said Baxter. "Ye must know quite a wheen ov them aroun' th' town, eh, McGrath?"

"I do that," said the rag-man, "an' I'll bate ye half a bap an' threacle to a hard-boiled egg that I can tell ye at laste wan quare thing about any maan, wuman, or chile, that ye can name—barrin' ov coarse, m'self!"

Heavy footsteps were heard coming down the entry: they were familiar to us, and we rejoiced. It was Withero, the stone-breaker, and he was the only man we knew who was a match for McGrath.

"Man alive," he said to McGrath, as he scanned the faces of those present, "ye're a sight fur sore eyes. I haven't laid an eye on ye fur a month ov Sundays. Where're ye been? Over helpin' th' Queen t' rule the Scotch?"

"No, ye're bate!" said McGrath. "I've been sellin' holy wather t' Orange Lodges!"

"Is this a can ov it?"

"Ay, this is a special brand I had sent from Rome fur Johnston ov Ballykillbeg."

"Well, wud His Holiness object if ye jist made Baxter a prisint ov it t' wash his feet—there's a smell aroun' here that ye cud hing yer hat on!"

"At laste, he might spare a few dhrops t' sprinkle on yer tongue, Withero," said Baxter.

"Sit down, Willie—sit down an' say somethin' nice fur a change," said Anna, "an' don't forget to remember that there's more senses than a sense of humour!"

"Ay, there's a sense ov dacency, Anna; but I wuz behind the doore whin th' wor givin' it out. M' mother—God rest 'er soul—wuz a dacent woman, but I tuk afther m' father, ay, I did that. Heigh-ho, it's a quare oul' world!"

"Ye must come across quite a wheen ov quare people at yer stone pile, Willie," said Jamie..

"Ye're a good guesser t' know nothin', Jamie. I haave that, an' I'll tell ye somethin', an' ye needn't let on, bekase it's a sacret: I'm the only maan in th' townland that isn't quare!"

"Well, it's no use joinin' a brass band unless ye can toot yer own horn!" said Baxter.

"Th' do say that ye talk a lot t' yerself, Withero. Is that true?" asked McGrath.

"It is that," said Withero, "but only whin I want a sinsible audience. Whin I'm not particular aany oul' fool that comes along is good enough, an' savin' yer prisince, an' manein' no offince, that's the rayson I'm always so dacent t' yerself!"

"I say, Anna," said Jamie, "these Solomons haave been aitin' razors fur supper; don't ye think a nice cup o' tay wud safen th' sharp edges a bit, eh?"

While Anna prepared the tea, Jamie put the finishing touches to the repairs of Baxter's boots, and the "Solomons" continued the flow of compliments.

"Seen oul' Dougall lately?" asked the stone-breaker.

"Now, *there's* a quare maan, if there iver was wan in th' wurrl'd," said Baxter.

"What's quare about Dougall?" asked Jamie.

"Why, man alive," said Withero, "he'd blaze like a tar barrel if ye put a match to his breath."

"That wudn't make 'im quare," said Jamie. "Ye cud light a baker's dozen ov them aany day in Darragh's pub."

"Isn't a maan quare that swallows a house an' lot an' th' happiness of his wife an' wains forby?"

"Maybe."

"Maan, Jamie, ye don't need t' be stark starin' mad t' be quare!"

"Ach, stop yer blitherin', Willie. Who's th' judge ov who's quare an' who isn't? You're quare bekase ye've nayther chick nor chile, I'm quare bekase I've

got sich a terrible lot ov childther. Th' vicar's quare bekase he won't let Orange flags on th' church steeple, oul' John Kirk's quare bekase he's a Presbyterian an' a Home Ruler, wee Misther McTammany goes along th' streets jinglin' his kays an' tossin' thim in th' air and Lord Massereene'd rether haave a ride wi' wan ov th' Drummonds on a side-cyar than ride behind a coachman in a tall hat an' buff breeches. Shure th' whole thing's so throughother that nobody knows who's quare an' who's an ijot ! It's jist balderdash —let's talk about somethin' we can ait ! ”

“ Oh, ay ; but ye didn't mention oul' Docther Taggart, Jamie,” said Baxter. “ Th' whole town thinks he's quare bekase whether ye've got a sore head, a broken ankle, a jumpin' toothache, or the yellow jaundice, he gives ye a double dose ov salts an' seeney ! Now can ye bate that fur quarenness, eh, Jamie ? ”

“ No,” Jamie replied, “ I can't bate it, but I'm jist as shure as gun's iron that I'm the only maan in th' town that isn't quare. Now put that in yer pipes an' smoke it. How's that tay gettin' on, Anna ? ”

“ Ye wudn't like t' settle th' question first—wud ye, dear ? ”

“ Not by a jugful ! That will take jist about a million years, an' ye can't steep tay that long an' enjoy it ! ”

By the time the tea was handed around, Baxter's boots were finished, and on his feet. The thermometer would have recorded the fact if we had had one, but we hadn't. We were nevertheless appreciative of the change. We youngsters did not relish all this palaver about the quarenness of mere humans. The quare antics of fairies, gnomes, fiends, and angels were more to our liking, and we hoped that Anna or the rag-man would give us a fairy or a ghost story before Jamie

gave the neighbours the pointed hint that we needed what remained of the candle to light us to bed.

We were not fond of Baxter. He was too matter-of-fact—always provoking discussion over things that didn't matter. We hoped the tea would change the programme, but it didn't. We watched Withero drain his cup to the very dregs. We hoped he would read our fortunes in the straggling tea-leaves at the bottom, but he didn't. Instead, he rolled off another list of quare people, and told us of their failings and foibles.

"Ye wor spakin' ov Dougall," he said. "Well, now, it's thtrue he dhrunk himself out ov house an' home, wife an' wains, until he had nayther mate, money, nor marbles, nor chalk t' make th' ring. Whin he got t' th' bottom, he did more quare things, but at laste wan o' these quare antics had a sauncy result."

"Oh, th' quare men wor not all behind th' doore whin th' wit wuz bein' handed out," said Baxter.

"As I wuz sayin'," the stone-breaker continued, "wan night Dougall didn't know where ur how t' raise th' wind—he'd got t' the wall at th' world's end, an' he'd his back up agin it. He wuz so thirsty that he disremembered his name. He wuz sittin' on th' wall ov Misthress Mulholland's pigsty, scratchin' his head an' switherin' t' bate th' devil, when an idea got intil 'im.

"Th' ceilin' ov Tomson's taproom wuz crack't an' baggy in th' middle, Dougall wuz a good plasterer, ye mind, so down he goes. A wheen ov oul' throllops wor settlin' the affairs ov th' universe in high dudgeon.

"What d'ye want?" says oul' Tomson, wi' a knowin' luk at Dougall.

"I'm lukin' fur McConky," says he, "an' I know he isn't here, but he's comin'." Up gits an oul' *caillach* from Muckamore, an' starts t' sing 'Crappies lie down.' Dougall kep' his eye on th' ceilin'. The

singin' wuz so bad that oul' Tomson wuz furyus. He winked Dougall out t' th' back doore, an', says he, ' If ye'll stuff a hot pirta in that ass's mouth,' sez he, ' ye'll haave a glass ov th' best on th' shelf.'

" ' Haave ye a hot pirta ? ' sez Dougall.

" ' I haave.'

" ' I'm yer maan,' sez Dougall. Jist then there wuz a divil ov a rumpus inside. A couple of Papists from Bow Lane had changed th' musical programme. Dougall's throat remained as dry as a whistle, but he kep' his eye on th' ceilin'.

" Afther a while, whin all their tongues wor waggin', widout rhyme or rayson—an' Tomson's whisky hed melted th' wits out o' their skulls, oul' McIntosh, ov Patey's Lane, wuz lifted ontill the long bench an' nothin' wud do but he'd hev t' recite th' Battle ov Scyarva ! Dougall stud be th' doore wid his eye glued to th' ceilin'. McIntosh wuz dhrunk in th' legs, frum th' knees down, an' jist cudn't balance himself on sich threacherous undtherpinnin'. Whin th' oul' fella dhropped in a heap, up steps me bould Dougall. ' Chaps,' sez he, ' I haaven't recited since I wuz th' size of a ragweed, but if ye can procure me an Admiral's three-cornered hat an' a good cavalry sword, I'll fayvor ye wid Shakespeare's famous pom, Balaclava.'

" ' We're short on naval outfits,' sez Misther Tomson, ' but ye can haave an oul' cavalry sword,' sez he, ' that cut th' liver an' lights out ov a rebel in '98.'

" While oul' Tomson wint fur th' sword Dougall fixed a chair undther the place where th' ceilin' bagged most. Sword in han', he gowled thru th' pom till he aruv at th' excited part. Thin he bellow'd like a Moylena bull :—

*" ' Into th' valley ov death—into th' mouth ov hell—  
Galloped th' six hundhred ! '*

An' wid that he hit th' ceilin' a skite wid th' sword,  
an' down it came wid a crash ! ”

“ Egad, I'll bate th' oul' spulpan got th' job ov  
plasterin' it up ! ” said Baxter.

“ He did that,” replied Withero. “ But isn't th'  
quareness ov a quare maan th' quarest conundthrum  
in a quare wurrlid ! ”

### III

A door closed with a bang. We knew it was McGrath's door just opposite ours.

“ I'll be hung, dhrawn, an' quarthered,” said McGrath, “ if that isn't oul' Jane comin' afther  
her wather.”

A moment later the rag-man's wife opened the door and entered.

She looked like a wet hen. Her hair was disordered, and she had forgotten to put all her clothes on. Jamie said afterwards that she looked as if she had been dragged both ways through a hedge.

The teacups attracted her attention.

“ Much good may it do ye,” she said, looking at Anna. Then she turned on her husband with an expression of contempt and said :—

“ When ye want t' sit like a clockin' hen an' cackle yer head off—why don't ye be civil enough t' let on ? ”

“ Here's th' wather, Jane,” said her husband. “ Take it an' give yer bitther tongue a holiday ! ”

“ I'm sorry, Mrs. McGrath,” said Anna, “ but ye see these wise men do be thinkin' long t' show off their wits before wan another.”

“ Ay, dear, yer sorely thried yerself, I don't mis-doubt, but ye see I've been sittin' in m' shift fur hours waitin' fur th' oul' baste, an' while I wuz sittin' shiverin' like a lase on a three, there wuz a rappin'

at the back windy—an' I do believe it wuz th' ghost of Liza Wallace, fur afther th' rappin' there wuz a strong smell ov bad fish—jist like oul' Liza, God rest her soul."

"Come over here into th' corner, dear," said Anna, "an' haave a good strong cup o' hot tay—it'll warm ye up."

"God-love-ye-Anna," said Mrs. McGrath, between her loud sups, "how d'ye stand so maany men comin' an' goin' all th' time?"

"Well, dear, ye know it wudn't be all curds an' whey if it wuzn't fur th' fact that Jamie and me earn our livin' by improvin' their undtherstandin'."

Mrs. McGrath didn't see the point, but ventured the suggestion that "there wasn't nothin' they needed so much."

"They've been palaverin' about quare people," Anna said, "but I noticed that all th' quare people they talked about were men."

"Throth, I hear they're doublin' th' men's ward in th' asylum," said Mrs. McGrath, "a wink like that shud be as good as a nod to a blind horse, eh, Anna?"

"Ay, but th' throuble is, dear, ye can only wink at some men wi' an axe."

"Rubbitch!" said Jamie.

"Worse nor rubbitch!" said Baxter.

Anna laughed, and Mrs. McGrath increased the noise of her supping.

"It's only among ijots that men are two t' wan," said McGrath. "Among quare people th' wimin are four t' wan, ay, th' are that, jist as shure as wather runs an' grass grows!"

"Livin' wi' quare men, how cud th' privint it, Tam?" said his wife.

"Jane," said Tam, "ye haave a fine tongue for clippin' hedges—"

The light went out. Jamie was snuffing the candle with his thumb and forefinger, but had gripped it too low and extinguished it.

"Where wuz Moses whin th' light went out?" said Baxter. A piece of paper was folded and lit at the burning turf. Anna handed it to McGrath, and he passed it on to Jamie. As the big tallow candle blazed up, Anna said so softly:—

"Now God be thanked fur light."

On that there was no comment. It was one of those touches of tender mysticism that always smoothed out for the moment our roughness. How strangely thin that veil that divided the seen from the unseen! How near laughter to tears, and the uncouthness of untrained tongues to the most refined things of the spirit.

The work of the day over, Jamie set the big candle-stick in the midst, and turned his face towards the glow of the burning peat. That was the signal to us that the gentle hint to the neighbours to take their leave would soon be forthcoming, and when they were gone Anna would draw up the table, and we would have the last "bite" of the day together.

Tam McGrath, feeling that the man had been rather worsted in the endless theme, spread his legs out on the floor and wound up the night's discussion with a story of a quare woman.

#### IV

"D'ye mind Johnny Gerner, ov Killead?" he asked.

"Oh, I mind him rightly," Jamie said.

"He was a quare man, if iver there wuz wan," said McGrath, "an' so wuz his wife, but she was the quarest ov th' two. We lived forinst thim years agone. Johnny wuz a great maan fur the fife an' dhrum, an' a terrible hater ov the Papishes. He jist

lived fur the glory ov wearin' a sash on th' twelfth 'n' Lein' a chaplain; he carried th' Bible ov his lodge in all their doin's. In money matthers he wuz close-fisted, an' in matthers ov religion as narrow as a hen's face—ay, 'deed there wuzn't a closer-fisted maan between Anthrim an' Donaghadee."

"An' I'm th' boy that knows it," said Withero. "Johnny had a big body, but his wee sowl wud haave had as much room in a thimble as a bumbee wud in Lough Neagh. Ay, that's Johnny Gerner, of Killead."

"His wife's father wuz a Papish an' her mother wuz a Protestant," continued McGrath, "but Maggie wuz nayther nor didn't want to be. She'd jist as soon wear a sprig ov shamrock on the seventeenth as an orange bow on the twelfth, but Johnny smiled at th' bow and gurned at th' shamrock. She never had a ha'penny she cud call her own. Wan day she thought she'd thry t' bamboozle him out ov a shillin' ur two. She up and towld Johnny she wanted t' buy a shift. He said he'd buy it. She said no man that iver stepped in black leather boots wud buy a shift fur her. 'Thin,' sez he, 'ye'll go without.'

"Wan night whin Johnny came home he found a shillin' lyin' on th' table in th' front room.

"'Where did that come frum?' sez he.

"'Th' man above only knows,' sez she, 'but I shudn't wondther if Bob Coyle didn't lave it. He wuz here this afthernoon.'

"'What wuz he here fur?'

"'Well now, dear knows, except jist t' see how all th' worrld an' his wife was thratin' Maggie Gerner.'

"'What fur shud he lave a shillin'?'

"'I dunno, but bein' an oul' friend o' mine I did up an' tell him th' God Almighty thruth that frum wan year's end t' th' other I hadn't a shillin' t' call m' own—ay, 'deed I did that!'

"'What did ye give 'im fur th' shillin'?'

"Th' brute baste!" said Mrs. McGrath.

"Whisht yer noise!" said McGrath, as he looked disapprovingly at his wife, and proceeded.

"Maggie gowl'd as if her heart wud split in two, but Johnny was as could as a stepmother's breath. Nixt mornin' he wuz still in th' tanthrum. Whilst aitin' his breakfast he tuk th' shillin', toss't it in th' air, catch't it, an' slapp'd it on th' table. Not a wurr'd did he spake. Ivery two ur three sups ov tay he tuk he'd toss up an' slap down th' shillin'. First th' noise wuz like hittin' a barn doore wi' yer fist. Thin he larned how t' make a sharp cuttin' noise b' clickin' it. He click't at breakfast, he click't at supper. First th' clickin' hurt her ears, thin it hurt her brains, thin it hurt her heart. Ivery click seemed louder nor th' last wan. Sometimes th' craither heard th' clickin' all day long. Sometimes she'd hear it in a nightmare, an' wake up wid a scream.

"Fur two whole calendther years he didn't spake a wurr'd till her. Whin he'd be forced t' spake, he'd write it on a slip ov paper. He kept th' bed. She lay on a shakedown be the fire. Ivery day wuz like ivery other—jist the raspin', gratin' sound of click, click, click.

"She thried t' make him spake, but she might as well haave thried t' stick a plaster on a hedgehog. Wan day she tuk a hatchet an' chop't up the table. He didn't bate her, he jist kept on clickin' on th' dhresser. She made kindlin' ov th' dhresser, an' he click't it on a stool. She stapp't goin' out. She wudn't comb her hair, she wudn't cook his males nor wash his shirt, nor nothin'. He niver laid a han' on her. He jist kept on clickin', clickin', clickin'.

"Wan day she dhres't up an' wint till th' poorhouse, an' ax'd to be taken intil the asylum fur th' mad.

"'But yer not mad,' sez Misther Gardner.

"'But I'm goin',' sez she.

“ ‘We cyant take ye till ye’re gone,’ sez he.

“ Well, it’s a long lane that hes no turnin’. Wan day Johnny wuz puttin’ a coat ov thatch on Mistress Cur’in’s cottage, an’ he fell off th’ roof an’ broke his neck.”

“ God be thank’t fur that,” said Mrs. McGrath.

“ It’s betther nor bein’ hung,” said Baxter.

Turning to Anna, McGrath said :—

“ Now what wud ye think Maggie Gerner did, eh, Anna ? ”

“ Dear knows,” Anna said. “ Maybe she jist washed up an’ begun life all over again.”

“ I’ll bate a ha’penny she said, ‘ Good riddance t’ bad rubbitch,’ ” said Baxter

“ What wud ye say, Jamie ? ”

“ Ax me somethin’ aisy,” said Jamie. “ Shure only God cud tell what a wuman wud do, an’ He isn’t always shure.”

“ Well,” said McGrath, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, “ ov all th’ animals that wint into th’ ark, wuman wuz th’ quarest, ay, as shure as rent day she wuz. She sowld th’ house an’ garden, and wi’ th’ money bought a fine headstone ov the kind that quality puts up. She hed big goold leathers on it : ‘ In lovin’ mimory ov John Gerner, erected by his devoted an’ sorrowin’ wife.’ An’ down at th’ bottom she hed : ‘ *Not lost, but gone before.* ’ ”

Late that night, when the neighbours had all gone, Jamie and Anna sat by the fire talking over the strange case of the Gerners. Opinions were divided as to which of them was the quarest. To the mind of Jamie, Mrs. Gerner was by long odds the quarest of the two. When rather worsted in the argument he just ended the quiet colloquy by saying :—

“ Well, she bate the devil.”

“ Ay, dear,” said Anna, “ an’ that wuz her intintion ! ”

## CHAPTER X

### HIMSELF

*“I think I see Anna in the fair fields of  
heaven, and Jamie—safely arrived.”*

JANE BARLOW.

JANE seems to have had an idea that Jamie had a hard time in getting there—and he had. Any one who held that opinion, received it from Jamie himself.

There is no hard and fixed line of demarcation between the dialect of the north and that of the south. Expressive words and phrases have a way of travelling beyond the domain of their origin. Very often when referring to Jamie, Anna would simply say, “Himself.” When met on the street and asked how *everything* was at home, Jamie would reply, “She’s all right!” These words and phrases were more common in the south, but they were familiar, too, in the north.

When Nature was fashioning Jamie, she intended to give him the appearance of an oak, but she dropped into a reverie and while swithering over it changed her mind, and gave him the appearance of a cedar instead. He always looked to me like a cedar whose branches had an arrested development—cropped rather close to the trunk, and scantily clothed with foliage.

A cedar, exposed to wintry blasts, wraps its roots the more tightly around the rocks and battles for standing room, and the fiercer the struggle the more rugged the appearance. He was of medium physical

proportions. He had a rugged face, seamed and scarred by time and care. He had a pyramidal nose and a strong, firm mouth.

The special feature of the homely, kind face was the eyes. They were of a grayish blue. They were windows through which we could all look into his mind and tell with certainty its varying moods. There were times when they looked like live coals and at other times they were full of an ineffable tenderness.

He had a voice that could be full of thunder. It was rarely that. Mostly it had a soft, purring sound, and irresistible in its appeal. In laughter he couldn't shake the floor, for it was made of mud, but he shook the bench and shook himself in every fibre of his being. He had a limited vocabulary, and was usually unfortunate in his selection of phrases, but to accuse him of profanity would have been an insult. He could punctuate his conversation with expletives which exploded, in what, to him, was mere emphasis, but which to others of a wider range of words would appear profane.

He had no theological views, but some very definite ideas about religion. To keep the Sabbath as rigorously as the Pharisees, to do good work, make reasonable charges, and keep out of debt were cardinal things to him. All questions of a theological nature he referred to Anna. He did this at first as a means of escape, but later because he enjoyed the ease with which she confounded the sermon tasters and theological experts.

He established a standing threat to "whale hell" out of any of us who whistled or played shinny on Sunday. We never feared him—not even when he added a little lightning to his thunder.

The Queen was, to him, the acme of human perfection, but he vowed that he would refuse to mend

even her boots after twelve o'clock on Saturday night. This dogmatism on the Sabbath did not appeal to Anna, and occasionally she would suggest that "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."

"I don't care a damn what it was made for, Anna," he would reply, "the Sabbath's the Sabbath, an' forby, how am I t' know what the thing was made for?" He went to church a dozen times, but each time he had a good excuse. On these occasions he attended the baptisms of one of his own children. He "glunched" (complained) a good deal about these functions, because he had to bow to the superior knowledge of Anna, and put on a dickey.

"Botheration," he would say, "I hate the — things, it's like rehearsin' for th' gallows!" In such extreme agony Anna would remind him of his own pet phrase—one he wore threadbare to folks in trouble: "Thole it an' bate it!"

## II

He donned a dickey once to attend the funeral of a Catholic neighbour. It so annoyed him that he brought it home in his pocket.

"It's a scandal, dear," Anna said.

"Ay, of course it is," he sneered, "but there was one man who agreed with me!"

"Who, in pity's name?"

"Th' corpse!"

"How do ye know?"

"His wife tould me that his last words were: 'Don't bury me with a dickey on—if ye do I'll come back from purgatory and frighten the soul out o' ye!'"

On one occasion, when discussing the question of an after life, Jamie said:—

"If I iver get there, it'll be just because I'm her

husband." As he spoke, he jerked his thumb in the direction of the chimney corner.

"An' supposin'," said Anna, "th' send me to the other place, Jamie?"

"Well, in that case," he said, "it wouldn't be hell at all, at all!"

At his work on the bench he sang a good deal. He sang when he was merry and he sang when he was sad. *Black-Eyed Susan* was one of his favourite ballads. When I took a pair of boots to a customer and returned without the price, he would express himself in song:—

"*Och, it's a wondtherful world t' live in,  
T' lend or spend or give in,  
But t' beg or borrow or git wan's own,  
Shure it's th' worst ould world that iver was known!*"

The religious feuds of Ireland were of less interest to Jamie than to any Irishman I ever knew. All sorts of men and women aired their views on current topics to him. He heard all, and argued with very few. Those who have to sit barefooted in a cobbler's shop until their boots are mended are not usually the best informed in the community, and Jamie knew that. With wild vagaries he was tolerant—not that his business interests demanded diplomacy. He knew his customers were "jist bletherin'" to pass away the time.

Sometimes he would strike a positive note.

"When ye show me a man who is happier because he hings his hat up in a particular place o' Sundays, or because o' th' colour ov the cockade he wears, it'll be time enough fur me t' take a han'."

"Ah, oh ay," Ben Baxter said in answer to that, one day, "but how'd ye like t' live undther th' rule ov a Pope, Jamie?"

"That's blether, Ben; it's worse nor blether, it's

a ha'penny pistol cocked in people's faces, until they come t' believe it's a loaded revolver. It's the blether ov a parrot or a magpie whose tongue has bin split wi' a sixpence. If th' Queen lived at wan end ov th' street, an' the Pope at th' other, it wouldn't make onny difference t' me. Their oul' boots wud niver come down our entry t' git mended. No, 'deed they wudn't ! ”

Anna confessed that she missed most what she had never possessed. With Jamie it was different. The ordinary pleasures of civilised man he never knew and never craved. He never saw a play, never attended a concert. There were occasional summer excursions, he never took such an outing. He could neither read nor write. Art, Literature, Drama, Music, and their uplifting influence, were things he scarcely ever heard of, much less enjoyed. Of course, there were others, many of them, nearly a townful of them.

His workshop was also our dining- and living-room.. It measured about twelve by fourteen feet.

There was no room for furniture, even if there had been money to buy it. The old shelf had more broken crockery on it than it had of whole. The walls were whitewashed, and a few ornaments sat on the old yellow mantelshelf over the fireplace.

His life was one of unrelieved toil—toil for less, much less, than what other poor folks called “ the bare necessities.”

‘If he had been asked why he continued to carry on, day after day, year in year out, I think he would have looked towards Anna, as he always did when he was puzzled, and would have expected her to answer the question. If forced to answer it himself, he would have enumerated the pleasures of life. They were very real to him. Sorrow was an intruder —a temporary visitor at most. His will to live was based on love. The out-working of that love was a

perfect understanding between them. The coming of the children, so many of them, one after another, added to his interest in life. Each of them brought a hope. Often these hopes were at low ebb, and sometimes a hope sickened and died, but there were always enough live ones to give new interests.

I am sure that in making up a debit and credit account he would have omitted many things of importance. When reminding Anna, as he did often, of the early years of their married life, a strangely beautiful light was in his eyes. Memory, therefore, consciously or unconsciously, was a strong factor, and bound him more closely to the supreme object of his tenderest solicitude. He had a few friends. They came on Sundays and occasionally at other times, and brought the news of their own particular little worlds.

### III

Sunday was not only visiting day, it was shaving day too, and for that Jamie needed half the whole house. One of my brothers brought home a sporting paper once, and in it was a full-paged picture of a roped enclosure with two prize-fighters in the centre.

"Now, that's the kind o' thing ye need, Jamie," Anna said, showing it to him.

"What fur?"

"T' shave in!"

"Oh, no," he said, with a thin smile, "I don't need the space, but I'd like to hire them two husky fellahs t' keep m' family in ordther while I'm shavin'."

He had a shaving temperament. It was the occasion when all the acerbities in his nature came to the surface. His paraphernalia was like a midshipman's chest—everything on top and nothing handy.

Within a space of about seven by nine feet he must have walked miles during each shave—from the

kettle hanging on the chain to the bit of broken mirror in the front window—to the strap on the south wall—to the tub in which he steeped his leather—to and fro, back and forth, sputtering, puffing, stropping, and lathering over and over again. If he cut himself he would blame it on us, or on the razor, and talk as if he were bleeding to death ! If we giggled, we took good care to do it outside.

“ I don’t think the Almighty can be plazed with yer galavantin’ aroun’ th’ house on Sunday mornin’ with a bad temper in yer heart an’ a razor in yer hand, Jamie ! ” Anna once said.

“ Oh, yer quite mistook ! ” Jamie said. “ He’s highly plazed ! ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because it says in the Bible that cleanliness is next t’ godliness ! ”

“ Oh, no, it doesn’t ! ”

“ Well, since ye know sich an awful heap, what diz it say ? ”

“ What about ? ”

“ Shavin’ ! ”

“ Nothin’ ! Except that wimin mustn’t ! ”

“ Yer jist foolin’ ! ”

“ Dear knows I’m not.”

“ Ha ! ha ! ” Jamie laughed ; “ that’s a good joke on God ! ”

“ What is ? ”

“ Tellin’ a woman not to shave. Bad scran to it all. I’ll bate He did that jist because he know’d rightly it wuz th’ only Commandment that a woman wud iver willingly obey ! ”

Anna was an adept in smoothing over difficulties, either our own or those of our neighbours. There were some that baffled her. Jamie had little tact. He was very blunt. One night I fell asleep in front of the fire. When I awoke I knew it was past any

time. Dreading to be sent aloft to my attic, I feigned sleep and kept still. They were discussing a problem, the solution of which was handed over to Jamie.

In the next entry there lived a young unmarried woman who had two children. Failing in health, she could no longer work for them. The father of one of the children was quite able to help her, but she was too proud to ask aid from one who had thrown her aside.

Anna told Jamie the whole story, and he was so wroth that he determined to act.

"Yer words are too saft, Anna," he said, "th' spulpan needs a man t' read th' riot act. Th' baste has no conscience at all, that ye cud appeal to. Let me handle him!"

So between them they staged a one-act play. On a Sunday afternoon the house was cleared. We were all sent off. The old folks only remained. In the space usually occupied by the work-bench, a basket of turf dust or coom was scattered over the mud floor.

In the coom had been scattered a handful of peas. For a hungry child this was a device for what was called "divartin' th' hunger." When there were several children the scramble to find the peas was diversion while there was a pea to be found, but in the staged play one little fellow had a monopoly. He was just about three, and when shown how to find the peas he was taken over into the corner.

As Peter McGonigal's steps were heard at the door, the boy was given the freedom of the coom pile again. Peter was given a seat where he could see every movement of the child. When the weather and the crops had been discussed, the child became the centre of interest.

"Th' wee fellah acts as if he cud ate a man off his horse!" said Peter.

"Ay, he diz that," Jamie said, "an' shure there

isn't a thrush's ankle o' nourishment in th' heap,  
What's a open (handful) of pays?"

"It's like a daisy in a bull's mouth!" Peter replied, with evident sympathy.

"An' t' think that th' poor chile should starve jist because he came into th' world without proper credentials," Anna added.

"Whose chile is he?" asked Peter.

"A neighbour's—a poor craither who hasn't a leg t' stand on fur wakeness."

"Man alive, it's the throughother world we live in!" said the unsuspecting villain of the piece.

It was Anna's part to tell the story. She spoke quietly, and told of a girl's brave fight against great odds. She told of the unmarried mother's struggle to support the unnamed child, and she told it in such a way that it turned into whatever conscience there was to work on.

"The curse of Cromwell on such a brute of a Turk!" hissed Peter, between his clenched teeth.

"An' if she wuz your sister, Pether, what would ye do to him?" Jamie asked.

"Me, Jamie, me? I'd hammer th' baste t' death be inches! I wud that, even if I had to hing fer it!"

Anna took the baby boy from the floor and placed it on Peter's knee.

"Cheer up, wee maan," Peter said, "there's a good time comin'."

"Ay," Anna said, with a touch of irony, "an' when the sky falls we'll all catch larks!" There was a harshness in his voice and fire in his eyes when Jamie said:—

"Pether McGonigal, *you* are the father ov the chile on yer lap!"

"Holy Mother ov God!" he gasped. There was deathly silence. No one spoke. Peter hung his head. Jamie and Anna went out and left him there. Five

minutes later he came out with the boy in his arms and carried him to his mother.

That night, just as the curfew ceased tolling, Molly Conner noiselessly entered, and sitting down on the floor beside Anna, laid her head on her lap and wept—wept in joy and gratitude.

#### IV

The time came when they were left almost alone. Most of us were scattered over the world. One married daughter only remained, living at times in the old home, and at other times in a home of her own. During the last years of Anna's life, Jamie softened and mellowed. His hair, though still shocky, was as white as snow. For nearly sixty years he had worked in a sitting posture, and the bent body seemed to refuse to straighten up. The stone-breaker left a gap when he went. The sweep went later, so did John Conlon and Sam Johnston, and a lot of others. Old and dear familiar faces no longer smiled in the glow of our peat fire. Nights became lonely—lonely and almost silent now.

One final sensation came at this period. Jamie scraped together for weeks and months enough money to furnish the one surprise of their later life. His power to work diminished, but their needs were few. Every market day he was seen around the second-hand furniture stall in the market-place. He asked the price of various things. The stall-keeper was very kind. He imagined the old man was becoming "quare in his mind."

One day he disgorged a few shillings he had hoarded, and made his purchase—carrying it as tenderly home as if it had been the ark of the covenant. It was a chair for Anna !

"Whose is it, dear?" she asked, as he fixed it in her corner.

"Ah, wuman, whose d'ye think, now?"

"Ye haaven't borrowed it, Jamie?"

"Divil a borrow. I've bought it, an' paid fur it, an' it's yours; an', d'ye know, I'd swither a good deal before I'd let the Queen sit in it! Ay, I wud that!"

It was cosy, comfortable, and not out of keeping with its surroundings. A chippendale in rough ash. It was the one luxury of her life.

She laughed with joy over it until she wept. Nothing that Jamie had ever done gave him greater pleasure. He was proud of it. Sometimes, as they had their cup of tea together, she would make him sit in it. He would refuse and hold out. Then she wouldn't touch her tea until he complied. That would always get him.

"Jamie, dear," she said one night, "I feel an awful regret runnin' through m' mind sometimes."

"You'll be thinkin' long fur the childther, eh?"

"No, not that."

"Fur th' ould times?"

"No."

"I'm bate!"

"I do be thinkin' long fur th' ould friends who are gone just t' haave a look at m' new chair!"

Jamie laughed and said:—

"Well, now, that reminds me. While I wuz waitin' fur the last shillin' fur th' chair—ye see I had an eye on it long before—I had a quare drame wan night. I thought I saw Withero sitting in your chair in th' corner, an', of coorse, he wuz reg'latin' th' affairs ov th' universe as usual, but he says to me in a cross-grained sort ov way, 'So ye waited till I wuz gone before ye got a chair, did ye, an' cock up th' likes o' ye to be apin' th' quality just as soon as yer friends

is laid undther th' sod. Ay, but I'm here, ye see, an' I'll be here iv'ry night now—jist put that in yer pipe an' smoke it ! ' I forget the rest ov his capers, but it wuz quare, wuzn't it ? ''

“ Ay, dear knows, dreams are quare, Jamie, but a great man once said that we're jist th' kind o' stuff that they're made of, an' if Willie can come back, you an' me can, can't we ? ”

“ The Man above only knows, Anna.”

“ I will go first, Jamie, but I will return, maybe in a dream, maybe in th' spirit, but——”

“ Don't talk about it, Anna, I can't thole it. Plaze don't.”

“ Oh, don't glunch, dear,” she said, as she took his rough hand in hers. “ We've got to talk about these things. Forby, I'll tell ye somethin' nice. Listen now. When we're both beyond the mists, an' there's no more cookin' or mendin' ould boots, I'll tell ye what we'll do ! We'll come back in th' summer wenings and go all through the castle gardens ! ”

“ Ha, ha ! ” he laughed, “ shure ye're jist dotin' ! ”

“ When they're all gone t' bed in th' castle,” she continued, “ we'll invite our friends, Withero, O'Hare, Mary McDonagh, John Conlon, an' our own childther who are over there an' here too, an' we'll haave a fine party in th' big parlour.”

“ Not Withero,” Jamie said, “ he'd spit on the carpets ! ”

“ Spirits don't spit, Jamie ! ”

“ Oh, well, ax him ! ”

“ Then we'll slide over th' nice grass lawns and play with the flowers. On Sundays we'll go to church and sit in his Lordship's pew.”

“ Ay,” Jamie interrupted, “ he'll be out shooting ! ”

“ Is everybody quality over there ? ” he asked in a half serious tone.

“ Oh, bless yer heart, ye needn't swither aany

over that. Beyond the clouds th' bigger th' love th' bigger th' quality. There'll be no puttin' on airs, or lettin' on yer somebody when ye're nobody. We'll all wear th' same kind o' clothes, an' eat th' same food."

"What'll we ate?" Jamie asked. She laughed, and said :

"I dunno, but whatever we ate it'll be nice. Maybe we'll haave friend sunshine and fur tay we'll haave rose-leaves stewed in dew that the angels gather off the violets."

"An' sup mist porridge with forks made ov lightning, eh, Anna?"

And they laughed together like children.

Then came a period of darkness for Jamie, which was followed by an almost total eclipse. In his own words, "she faded away like the laves on th' trees." Her days were few, and she spent them in pain, and in preparing Jamie for the inevitable. He attended her himself. He was full of hope, and refused to believe that she was going. He had grown somewhat deaf, and when he couldn't hear and wouldn't ask her to repeat what he missed, it was torture beyond words. At last he could only hold her hand and read her thoughts. Her feeblest whisper could have been heard and repeated by others, but that was not the same, and when her hand had pressed his for the last time, and the lovelight had gone out of her eyes for ever, he was stupefied.

They took him away from the bedside. The firstborn son returned. There was no light in the window now, nor light in the house. The neighbours came, the carpenter came, the minister came, and Jamie watched them all in silence—with a dazed look in his pain-stricken face.

A turf fire was built that night and the watchers gathered around it. About midnight tea was made. He was urged to have a cup. He refused. Suddenly

he arose, asked for a cup of tea, and entering the room of death, closed the door behind him. Silence reigned amongst the watchers. Jamie's voice broke the stillness in broken, husky accents : he was heard to plead :

"Anna, dear, ye'll share a cup for the last time—jist a sup—God love ye—spake t' me, Anna—spake jist wan last wurd before—ax God t' let ye luk at me an' share this last—"

The firstborn entered to take him away.

"Go away," Jamie thundered. "T'morra ye'll take her away an' put her under th' sod, but t'night she's mine—jist mine—go away ! "

And, awe-stricken, they left him there with his dead.

v

A month after the burial of Anna the sexton of the parish church saw Jamie rolling a big boulder along a pathway of the graveyard. The perspiration was pouring down his face, his hair was dishevelled by the effort. No one ever knew where he got it. When at the head of the new-made grave he mopped his brow with his sleeve and rested.

Somebody painted two letters on the stone, and he went home to wait. He waited longer than he expected, and much longer than he wanted.

"How are you, Jamie ?" a neighbour asked one day.

"I'm jist futherin' aroun' till th' lay me beside 'er in the churchyard," he answered.

The old chimney corner was now all his own. He sat on her chair, and used her cup and saucer. His dreams sleeping and waking were of her. He could talk of little else. He was like a man whose "flittin'" (furniture) had gone on ahead to the new home, while he remained in the empty house. He slept much,

and his ability to work had vanished with his desire to live.

One night before the end came he seemed to be on the border, and in his sleep muttered :

“ Ye seem to be purty nice quality over there ! Ay, ay, well, nobody’s got a dickey on—I couldn’t thole it, Anna—a dickey’s no shirt for an honest maan, aither dead ur alive.”

When he awoke he was told what he had said.

“ Well,” he said, smiling, “ yer mother said that all our good dhrames come thrue. Maybe mine will, ay, maybe it will, maybe it’ll come thrue in a day ur two.”

In a few hours after that he had solved the great mystery, and God, whom he had described as “ a rale Gintleman,” treated him kindly, I am sure.

T H E   E N D











